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Portraits within Portraits:
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Abstract

Dutch family portraits from the seventeenth century have been approached from two scholarly perspectives. One view focuses primarily on the concern to show familial harmony, while the other emphasizes the wish to convey prosperity. In my thesis I will argue that a third scholarly perspective should be combined with the other two viewpoints. I discuss three family portraits, one by Jan Miense Molenaer and two by Jacob Ochtervelt, that exemplify a visual representation of harmony, prosperity, and transience conveyed in the seventeenth-century Dutch family portrait.
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Contents

List of Illustrations..................................................................................................................vi

Introduction..................................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1
Family Making Music: An Iconographical Interpretation of the Musicians.........................9

Chapter 2
Family Portraiture and Economic Space.............................................................................26

Chapter 3
Portraits-within-Portraits: Harmony, Wealth, and Transience..........................................42

Conclusion.................................................................................................................................54

Bibliography...............................................................................................................................57

Illustrations.................................................................................................................................61
Illustrations


Introduction

During the seventeenth century, Dutch artists painted numerous family portraits for the merchant or middle class. They were commissioned from artists to document many valued aspects of family life, including ancestry and lineage, family size, wealth, and the moral character of each member. Paintings often documented family’s growing political influence, social status, religious affiliation, and personal pursuits. Recognizable symbols and coats-of-arms were used to enhance the attributes of a family that were particularly valued, such as high moral character, ancient roots, and ownership of country estates. Because of the importance of preserving such pictorial records, artworks were divided between surviving children. Copies of original works were often made and distributed to each member as they left the household.

Family portraits set in interiors in which other portraits were painted into the background are rare, and have received almost no attention from scholars. The artists Jacob Ochtervelt of Rotterdam (1634-1683) and Jan Miense Molenaer of Haarlem (c. 1610-1668) painted portraits within family portraits. Jan Miense Molenaer’s *Family Making Music*, 1630s (fig. 1), shows a family of eight brothers and sisters, four of whom are posed with musical instruments. In the background, other portraits of perhaps living and deceased ancestors and family members were hung on the walls. Jacob Ochtervelt also painted two family portraits with portraits in the background, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* from 1634-1646 (fig. 2), and *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, possibly from the 1660s (fig. 3). In the current available research, the portrait-within-a-family portrait has hardly been considered. I will explore the portrait-within-portrait paintings within an economic and socio-historical context, specifically focusing on the musical theme found in
Family Making Music, by Jan Miene Molenaer in Chapter 1; and concentrating on the spatial elements of The Elsevier Family Portrait and Portrait of the Lille Family by Jacob Ochtervelt, in Chapter 2.

The three primary portrait-within-portrait paintings of this study are both traditional and experimental. Many family portraits were commissioned to show an increased “cultural commitment to the nuclear family and its hierarchical relationships.”1 During the beginning of the seventeenth century, family portraits were often set in exterior settings, or combined interior scenes with the exterior. Views through windows and doorways were frequently painted into the background of family portraits set inside. As the century progressed, family portraits began to focus on domestic life and relationships.2 In this way, family portraits set in the home became a traditional genre portrayed by artists of the time. The inclusion of portraits in the backgrounds of family portraits was rare and experimental. Only a small number of art historians have briefly approached the experimental qualities of portraits-within-portraits. Three examples will be discussed in this thesis.

Few surviving examples of family portraits set in interiors depicted portraits displayed on the walls. Many marriage portraits, double portraits, and individual portraits can be found in museums and collections today that must have decorated the homes of the wealthy middle class in the Northern Netherlands, yet they are not depicted in as many family portrait home interiors as might be expected. This raises many intriguing questions: Why were portraits included as background in only a few extant family portraits? Of these few that survive, is there evidence that the background portraits still exist? What do these portraits within portraits tell us about the family? Do the background paintings symbolize

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2 Westermann 2001, 55.
the fleeting nature of life and commemorate dead loved ones? If family portraits were such an important part of immortalizing lineage, showing harmony, or flaunting wealth, why weren’t more portraits of families painted that include background portraits? Many questions about the setting and iconography are unanswered in the current available research. My thesis will attempt to answer some of the questions.

The seventeenth-century Dutch nuclear family was an important social institution honored in art. The Dutch prized familial qualities such as harmony, commercial aptitude, and prolific progeny. The growing wealth of the middle class provided citizens with the means to commission individual, pendant, and family portraits, along with many other types of paintings, to adorn their homes. Imitating the trends and styles established by the royalty and nobility, wealthy Dutch merchants could preserve a painted record of each generation. Family portraits began to mimic the relaxed, *sprezzatura* poses and interactive groupings of the upper classes. In *Dutch Art: an Encyclopedia*, Diane Mankin explains the social and cultural significance of these Dutch conversation groups.³

Although during the eighteenth century the English coined the most familiar phrase for such works, namely, calling them “conversation pieces,” the Dutch and Flemish painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed this branch of portraiture. Adolph Staring defined the conversation piece as: “A portrait-group of a family, with small-scale figures seen in the natural setting of their own home or garden, and behaving as people normally do when amongst good friends, i.e., naturally and simply,”⁴ but this definition applied more to eighteenth-century English portraits. The portrait-within-portrait paintings by Molenaer and Ochtervelt could be defined as conversation pieces, though

⁴ Adolph Staring in “Conversation Piece” 1997, 80.
there are varying degrees of success among painters in creating a convincingly casual scene. While Molenaer’s *Family Making Music* was set in a home, the figures are obviously carefully situated unnaturally in a semicircle as if posing for the artist. Their casual poses are actually rather stiff, and seem calculated to look informal. The family members do not appear to be behaving normally as if only in their own company or with friends. In Ochtervelt’s family portraits, the family’s position appears purposeful and not as if the artist casually glimpsed a moment in time. These family portraits strive to express familial harmony and a fortunate financial status through their well thought-out poses.

The first chapter will address harmony as represented in Molenaer’s *Family Making Music* of the 1630s. Portraitists experimented with recognizable symbols to relay information about the family members. Musical instruments could convey familial harmony, as well as learnedness because of the study and discipline required to master playing an instrument. In this family portrait, the musical instruments may have several layers of meaning. The four family members holding musical instruments may have played these exact instruments, or, more likely, the instruments could just convey personality traits specific to each of the sitters. The instruments have been identified, from left to right, as a cittern, a violin, a lute, and a violoncello. Slightly behind the instrumentalists, a girl stands in the middle of the group, cradling what looks like a music book in the left arm, and holding her right hand in a position that indicates singing. The other three members of the family in the semicircle who are not involved with making music seem content to listen. In the immediate left foreground, the dog curled on a pillow at the foot of the eldest-looking daughter, appears to be fast asleep and oblivious to the

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5 Alternatively, in some genre works, musical instruments could symbolize unbridled passions and sexuality. An example of this other meaning can be seen in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1510, by Hieronymus Bosch.
sounds and movements of the group.\textsuperscript{6} Also important to the painting are the two half-length pendant portraits on the background wall, with one holding a skull and the other with an hourglass and eight smaller bust-length portraits also hung across the lower back wall of the room.

In chapter two, Jacob Ochtervelt’s paintings will be investigated and related to the Dutch idea of mercantile and familial success as it relates to architecture and the economics of space. The depiction of space within paintings is important in deciphering the layers of representation. Interior architectural elements and statues could appear to elevate a family’s social class, whether real or imaginary. In the \textit{Elsevier Family Portrait} of 1664 and \textit{Portrait of an Unknown Family} the architecture and amount of available wall space surrounding the figures suggested wealth and elevated status. Most Dutch families could not afford houses in which large paintings could be displayed.\textsuperscript{7} In the \textit{Elsevier Family Portrait}, the figures exist within a room with two large paintings, two portraits, and a half-empty wall, emphasizing their financial success. In \textit{Portrait of an Unknown Family}, the family members are set within a large room filled with delicacies and decadent goods. Fruit, wine, pets, and pendant portraits within the compositions show the family’s prosperous status. Within the composition, the gestures of the sitters, their props, and their spacious architectural surroundings relay a highly sophisticated message about the family’s commercial achievements.

\textsuperscript{6} Dogs were always popular props in Dutch painting and, in the seventeenth century began to be infused with and represent double meanings. Dogs were viewed as loyal and faithful, but they also began to symbolize lustful passions and behavior. On this, David Smith wrote “moralizing symbolism is a characteristic feature of Dutch family portraits in the seventeenth century.” Smith, David, “Rembrandt’s early double portraits and the Dutch conversation piece.” \textit{Art Bulletin}, 262.

The third chapter will endeavor to explain why two of the portrait-within-portrait paintings are both traditional and experimental. Depicting enduring family traits while also warning of life’s transient nature forms are some of the themes emphasized in these paintings. Pendant and single portraits naturalistically depicting deceased adults and children as if alive are not uncommon. There were also portraits of the living family members with dead children shown as cherubs. There are even portraits of a man with his two deceased wives next to him.\(^8\) Molenaer is using the portrait to show the dead with the living. The portrait of the man hanging in the center of the painting was most likely posthumous at the time of the family portrait, shown by a skull he holds with his right hand, but the portrait of the woman in the center of the painting was probably still living, shown by the not entirely emptied hourglass next to her. The two men at left may also be dead,\(^9\) which is indicated by them being behind the painted harpsichord. Some art historians have suggested that Molenaer indicated the passage of time by including the background portraits of the deceased in the same space with the living.\(^10\) The objects throughout *Family Making Music*, especially the clocks, skull, and boy blowing bubbles, provide further visual support for the theme of the transience of life. Jacob Ochtervelt’s *Elsevier Family Portrait* and *Portrait of an Unknown Family* have been investigated even less than Molenaer’s *Family Making Music* has. The theme of the *Elsevier Family Portrait* was common; a merchant class family displays its wealth and social status in an impressive setting. However, in this final chapter, I contend that the theme of the temporal versus the eternal is often overlooked in these paintings. I will expand on the limited scholarly

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research and theories regarding these works. These portraits within family portraits played an intimate role in relaying familial harmony, flaunting financial success, immortalizing lineage, but they also remind the viewer of inevitable transience.

**Methodology and Literature Review**

Since E. de Jongh’s groundbreaking work from the 1960s and 70s, iconographic interpretations of portraiture and genre paintings have often relied on emblematic sources in order to interpret their meaning. De Jongh’s *Portretten van echt en trouw*, thoroughly examined the iconographical range of meanings in traditional Dutch marriage and family portraiture.11 His more recent, *Questions of Meaning* is also a good source for iconographic interpretation. I will apply both an iconographical approach and a socio-historical approach to interpreting family portraiture. I have also relied on a number of sources on the history of group and family portraiture including Märiet Westermann, *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, Harry Berger, Jr., *Manhood, Marriage, and Mischief: Rembrandt’s ‘Night Watch’ and Other Dutch Group Portraits*, and David R. Smith, *Masks of Wedlock: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Marriage Portraiture*. A few of the useful general studies of art and culture are: Bob Haak, *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Golden Age*; Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*; and Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*.

There is an overall dearth of writing on Jan Miense Molenaer and Jacob Ochtervelt. Dennis P. Weller wrote a biography, *Jan Miense Molenaer*, 2002, thatcatalogues a visual progression of the artist’s works. The author surveyed Molenaer’s life, but did not fully

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11 Unfortunately, *Portretten van echt en trouw* is only in Dutch with only a short English summary.
explore the artist or the symbolic implications of the objects in his portraits. The 1979 monograph on Jacob Ochtervelt by Susan Donahue Kuretsky catalogues his work, but does not explore meaning. Very few art historians have followed up to expand our knowledge of the artist. Ochtervelt’s painting Family Portrait was included in Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age, 2003, by Klaske Muizelaar and Derek Phillips, but only a paragraph was written about it. The presently available scholarship provides only a narrow view of Dutch family portraiture. I have found minimal writings about the significance of portraits within portraits paintings. The literature that briefly discusses the three paintings, Family Making Music, Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family), and Portrait of an Unknown Family, provides a narrow interpretation of these works, usually addressing only harmony or wealth. I plan to examine the family portraits with a combined analysis, addressing harmony, wealth, and transience.
Chapter 1:  
Family Making Music: An Iconographic Interpretation of the Musicians

In the mid-1630’s, Jan Miense Molenaer painted a family portrait which is commonly known as Family Making Music (fig. 1). Many art historians have agreed on the title and the interpretation of the family portrait, but have not analyzed the painting’s individual qualities thoroughly enough. The interpretations and iconographic studies have focused on a moral reading of the painting. Scholars have, however, overlooked the character of the interaction between the figures and some of the noteworthy aspects of depicting part of the family as a musical group. The four family members who hold musical instruments and the girl holding a songbook dominate the left and center foreground and must be significant in the overall purpose of the painting. The three right foreground figures in Family Making Music react to the sitters playing musical instruments. The two older gentlemen in the left middle ground are also probably family members, though they seem separated in time and space from the young people in the foreground; I will discuss their significance in Chapter 3. My goal in this chapter is to identify the attributes of the musical instruments, to link the attributes of each musical instrument to the specific family member, and to provide a combined interpretation of the group as a musical company and a harmonious family.

Although Jan Miense Molenaer was known foremost as a genre painter, Family Making Music is not thought to be a genre work, but a family portrait. The faces of the

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12 Both David Smith and Märiet Westermann have addressed the painting as an allusion to familial harmony. Smith has also argued that the painting’s composition is awkward because of the figures strained poses. Harry Berger, Jr. agrees that the painting emphasizes the harmonious nature of the family, as well as moderation, and fidelity. He also interprets the relationships the sitters have with each other with some allusion to mortality.
sitters are each distinct, yet similar features identify them as family members. Button noses, identical chins and hair lines, and the overall shared facial structure lead the viewer to believe the sitters are related. 13 Another attribute familiar to family portraits but not to genre works is the outward look of each figure. Genre paintings are usually thought to capture a moment in time in which the figures are anonymous and generally unaware of the viewer. 14 By contrast, the people in this painting are distinctively dressed and posed and appear to be sitting for the artist; their specific gestures and poses are intended to convey meaning that records certain traits of individuals and of the family as a whole. In genre works, generic people are captured in a moment. The Family Making Music sitters do not look at each other or their surroundings, as is usually true in a genre work. The family members are aware of the artist and the presence of a viewer. Although art historians in the past have agreed that Family Making Music is a family portrait, most have approached interpreting the painting as if it were a genre work.

A recent addition to the scholarship on Family Making Music was written in 2002, when Dennis P. Weller compiled Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age. Weller wrote several essays in the exhibition catalogue of the paintings of Jan Miense Molenaer. The exhibition ran from October 2002 to January 2003, but did not include the painting Family Making Music. 15 However, in this catalogue, Weller renamed the painting Self-Portrait with Family Members, ca. 1636, in a short section of the introduction. Weller identified the foreground group as the artist’s seven brothers and sisters; Jan Miense

13 Dennis P. Weller, Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age, (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2002). Weller states that the sitters can be identified as family members because of their “cleft chins, bulbous noses, and broadly set dark eyes” (p.2).
15 Weller 2003, 2.
Molenaer is the standing adult located on the right side of the painting. Weller’s identification of the sitters as the siblings of the artist was based on primary birth and death certificates of the oldest and youngest members of the family.16 Assuming that this might be the Molenaer family, the only true adults are possibly Molenaer and his oldest sister; all other siblings look like teens or younger. Although several authors suggest the age of the figures in the painting, including the men behind the virginal, range from middle-age to youths,17 the lack of facial hair on the brothers imply that they are really boys. The seated lute player might be in his late teens, whereas the other two males and the girl in the center appear to be younger. Jan Miense Molenaer assembled the sitters into two clusters. The youthful music making siblings are on the left of the composition. The two small children on the far right of the composition seem preoccupied with childish activities and possessions. The size of these children, approximately half the size of the adult figure in black, separates them from the rest of the family members. The small boy plays with his bubble maker and looks up at his older sister. She is dressed in an adult garment, but is clearly smaller than the adult man in black. These issues will be discussed further in the following chapters.

As the tallest member of the group, the man Weller identifies as the artist stands out with his expensive black and white outfit and sprezzatura pose.18 Weller writes that this man can be identified as Molenaer for many reasons “including [the] similarities with other self-portraits”;19 however, no exact paintings were cited. The author’s arguments are

16 Weller 2003, p. 3.
18 Sprezzatura pose- The confident pose usually shown by a man standing with his weight on one leg and with one glove on as he holds the other in the same gloved hand.
intriguing, but he fails to prove his theory of a self-portrait and family, by failing to provide adequate sources. By comparing the man of the artist in Family Making Music with the figure of Molenaer in Self-Portrait as a Lute Player (fig. 4), 1635, a similarity between the two men becomes plausible. The two men share the same hair, nose and mustache. For the purpose of this thesis, the figure dressed in black will be considered as Jan Miense Molenaer.

In 2007, Harry Berger, Jr. wrote a section on the painting Family Making Music in Manhood, Marriage, and Mischief: Rembrandt’s ‘Night Watch’ and Other Dutch Group Portraits. Berger expands and argues against interpretations previously made by art historians, such as Mariët Westermann, David R. Smith, and Dennis P. Weller. As the backbone of his essay, Berger develops an idea he calls “a ‘realistic’ notion of harmony.”20 He observes that Westermann, Smith, and Weller have ignored factors of gender and age when discussing the relationship between the family members in the painting. Berger’s notion of realistic harmony includes tension between the female and male members of the group based on positioning. He claims that the matronly figure painted in the pendant on the background wall has an imposing and dominating presence that creates the tension between the female and male family members in the foreground. Although Berger’s study is thorough, his arguments are ambiguous and obscure. The matriarch’s painting is lighter and more noticeable than the patriarch’s painting; nevertheless, the background paintings are tangential to the eight sitters and their interactions with each other. Berger focuses on a less important interaction before analyzing the primary relationships between the siblings. The presence of the parents ‘watching over’ their children via the pendant portraits has

some significance, to be discussed in Chapter 3; however, the more prominent figures will be explored within the context of their time in this chapter. Berger ignores context for the most part.

Berger also uses a geometric analysis to emphasize his points, claiming that Molenaer’s figures can be connected and grouped into triangles. The author discusses an isosceles triangle he sees connecting the three female family members. However, it seems plausible that triangles could be formed between any and all of the brothers and sisters. The painting does not seem geometrically sharp, but appears more fluid. The space between the figures is fairly evenly spaced and their bodies are positioned in a semicircle. Berger’s main idea of “realistic” harmony has conflicting elements. He claims that the family is harmonious while still vying for supremacy over the other members.\textsuperscript{21} In my opinion, Berger goes too far with his argument by trying to make the painting fit his theory rather than the other way around. He presupposes that the artist would consciously and purposefully have painted a tense situation while trying to convey harmony, thus making the work more reflective of real family dynamics. He starts with the more obscure possible meanings rather than examining the more concrete and logical possibility that the artist would not want to convey internal familial conflicts and rivalries in his own or another family’s. It seems unlikely that Jan Miense Molenaer would have included such incongruous thoughts while trying to convey a feeling of synchronization.

Instead of focusing on the moralizing or psychological interpretations of the portrait by the previously discussed by scholars, I will concentrate on the interactions of the music-making figures. The four musical instruments included in the painting \textit{Family Making Music} can be identified as, beginning from the left, a cittern, a violin, a theorbo lute, and a

\textsuperscript{21} Berger 2007, 163-173.
violoncello. In seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, musical companies have often been interpreted as a representation of harmony. Of the seven young people pictured, four of them hold instruments and a fifth sings. The musical instruments identify the family as a musical group. Musical accord is commonly applied to genre works that include music making. Similarly, art historians have commonly interpreted the painting *Family Making Music* as a metaphor for a harmonious family. It seems likely that Molenaer wished to visually portray the family as a harmonious unit while maintaining a naturalistic portrayal of each member’s individual characteristics. The musical instruments supply a visual congruity and a symbolic explication. Each musical instrument’s distinctiveness may represent each person’s temperament and familial position.

The main group, and primary focus of this chapter, consists of the five musical figures wholly centered against a wall dominated by family portraits. Based on Heinrich Wolfflin’s principles, we could say that the group forms a unified open whole, with one figure flowing into the next from one side of the painting to the other. The hands and instruments of the musical company form a daisy chain between the sitters. The musical instruments also connect the group visually. The cittern, violin, lute, and violoncello form diagonals in the painting; however, the players are positioned in a semi-circle across the center of the painting. A synchronized unity and harmony within the group are visually enhanced by the symmetrical placement and supple organization of the figures. The background walls and flowing drapery in the upper left encase the group in the foreground, stressing the semicircular assemblage constructed by the artist.

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22 Smith 1982, 68.
24 [http://web.sxu.edu/mdrl/222/wolfflin/wolfflin_2.htm](http://web.sxu.edu/mdrl/222/wolfflin/wolfflin_2.htm)
The female figure on the far left is shown playing the cittern, a member of the guitar family. The cittern was traditionally played by men, but in *Family Making Music* Jan Miense Molenaer has painted a young woman seated with the musical instrument on her lap. The proper young lady, in an upright, seated posture and lavish dress, appears to be in an awkward position. Her left hand is clutching the neck, pressing the strings with her fingers, while she stiffly plucks the eight strings with her right hand. The woman’s movement seems somewhat restricted by the amount of stiff ruffles around her neck and the extravagant quantity of material flowing from her waist. She seems quiet and assured, and her dress and pose are authoritative. Her confident nature is visually enhanced by the masculine instrument. The artist may have chosen the cittern as a prop because she looks like the eldest daughter of the group, thus emphasizing the status and responsibility she probably had in the home and in seventeenth-century Dutch society. If her mother was already deceased, she would have been mistress of the house, making her a household leader and authority commanding the respect of the others. The upright position of the cittern defines the left boundary of the musical family group. The position of her chair, facing the rest of the family members, also frames the group. Although the cittern player’s position on the end of the composition puts her in a position of authority, the dynamic of the group does not appear to be in opposition to her. The other family members do not compete for her space or authority.

The eldest sister sits in front of a virginal painted with a delicate landscape and petite carvings. In comparison with the other figures of the musical group, the young woman on the far left is stiff and proper. Her mouth is closed and she seems detached from

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the musical instrument that she holds. The cittern sits on her lap, extended away from her body. She sits in front of virginal; an instrument almost entirely played by women, and may point to her virtuous nature. Molenaer was possibly using the woman’s location within the group and musical prop to convey dominance and rank, while positioning her in front of a feminine device express refinement and poise.

*Harpsichords and virginals, which themselves often grace the domestic paintings of Vermeer and Steen as well as such vanities as Molnaer’s, were symbols of status as much as art and learning. Intentionally exemplary of fine craftsmanship as well as of cunning performance, such instruments bridge the chasm between decorative furnishing and skilled aural display. Nowhere else in domestic interiors were the senses brought so well together, or better unified with the intellect.*

Molenaer intended the woman to embody a duality of traits: a feminine character, yet family leader. By painting the cittern player before the virginal, the composition has closure.

In *The Duet*, 1635-36 (fig. 5), Jan Miense Molenaer has painted two similar figures, including a woman playing the cittern and a man playing the lute. Although the composition has been changed, the figures are depicted with musical instruments in similar poses to the figures in *Family Making Music*. Because the two paintings have analogous features, it seems likely that Molenaer used these instruments as props to signifying possible symbolic attributes of the sitters, whether the sitters could play the instruments or not.

The dog asleep at the foot of the eldest daughter is similar in both *The Duet, 1635-36*, and *Family Making Music*. The black and brown dog is curled in the exact position.

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26 Finlay 1953, 52-75.
28 This painting is not to be confused with the earlier Molenaer painting of the same name, *The Duet*, ca. 1630-31.
in both paintings and suggests that it was used as a prop, and was not painted *naer het leven* or an actual pet of the family.\(^{29}\) The dog appears asleep. It is situated on a black pillow next to the cittern player’s black dress. The artist has painted the dog in an inconspicuous way to confirm the family’s serene and calm nature. It represents the harmonious situation.\(^{30}\) The family is peaceful enough that the dog remains undisturbed by the music or any movements made by the group. Visually and symbolically, the dog represents tranquility. Molenaer used the dog and the musical instruments as props to signify qualities about the family in *Family Making Music*.

In *Family Making Music*, the second figure from the left plays the violin. During the seventeenth century, most typically men played the violin.\(^{31}\) The young man is shown holding the musical instrument in a resting position. He looks ready to play, but is not in the act of playing the violin. His right hand arches delicately over the bow with his thumb tucked under. The bow rests gingerly on his curled thumb, but the middle knuckles of his second and third fingers are not gripping the wood. “The violin of the seventeenth century differed structurally little from that of today,”\(^{32}\) but was played in a different manner. His fifth finger is shown lifted slightly off the bow. A musician seen in this pose could be considered between musical phrases. The bow rests on the higher strings at a ninety-degree angle for maximum clarity of sound. The body of the violin slides down the chest of the figure, a typical way of playing during the seventeenth century.\(^{33}\) Molenaer has tried to paint the neck of the violin using the technique of foreshortening. The artist’s attempt at

\(^{29}\) Weller 2003, 136. *Naer het leven* translates to: from life. (from _

\(^{30}\) Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning: Theme and motif in Dutch seventeenth-century painting*, (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 1995), 95. He states that the dog is “the stock symbol of faithfulness.” This symbol can be applied to the faithfulness of the family group and the accord within their relationships.

\(^{31}\) Finlay 1953, 56.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

foreshortening was not completely successful. It appears that the hand covers the entire neck of the violin with his left hand. In *Woman at Her Toilet*, 1633 (fig. 6), Molenaer painted a violin on the back wall from a strictly frontal view. The violin is in perfect proportion and would not have been dwarfed by a musician’s hand. The figure playing the violin in *Family Making Music* does not have a straight left wrist, again suggesting a musician at rest. Although the musician is not shown playing the instrument he holds, he is still quietly contributing to the harmonious nature of the family. During the seventeenth century, the violin was considered an unrefined instrument that was played by peasants and street musicians;34 however, in Molenaer’s *Family Making Music* it does not seem that the artist was trying to represent the boy as uncouth. Instead, the instrument may indicate the player’s lower status within the family unit.

The young man is right next to the virginal, where his right hand overlaps its lid. He seems to be in the same planar space as his singing younger sister, who will be described later. Compositionally left to right, the violinist appears to be squeezed between and behind two seated family members, the older sister and the lute player, so that his body is only partially seen from the chest up. Unlike the space occupied by the others, the young man’s movement appears restricted and uncomfortably close to the virginal. The placement of the violin player seems awkwardly compressed into a geometric shape and not part of the fluid space of the painting containing the other five older family members who do not crowd each other.35 They do not look like they need to fight for control of their space. The violinist does not have the equal space occupied by the rest of the sitters, and seems the most physically detached in the painting.

34 Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten 1997, 201.
35 Loughman and Montias 2000, 5.
The violinist’s dress further demonstrates his status as a member of the family group. It seems less flamboyant than his older siblings’, though it is difficult to see his entire outfit through his brother and sister. The boy’s collar appears smaller, unruffled, and less intricately lacy and fluffy than those of his elder brothers. It lays flat against his shoulders, with a narrow lace edging. Although the boy’s outfit is not as showy as other members of the group, the overall quality of his clothing is similar to the rest of the family’s. Children’s dress symbolized the continuity of the family’s prerogatives, rights, and privileges.36 His hat is in the same style as his two older brothers, referring to his unity within the family. The violinist’s attire is congruent with the family’s fashion.

Next in the line of family musicians is the older boy playing a lute. The lute is the most common instrument seen in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.37 The lute appears in family portraits as well as history paintings, high- and low-life genre works, and double and group portraits. In *Family Making Music*, the third figure from the left looks as if playing the theorbo lute, an instrument played equally by men and women.38 The young man’s left hand is shown gripping the neck and playing a chord on the frets. His elbow easily rests at his side and his left wrist looks straight and relaxed. The sitter’s right hand is in a position with the thumb and fingers ready to continue plucking the many strings of the musical instrument. In *Family Making Music*, the young man playing the lute is shown with his right hand plucking the strings far below the hole. In *Musical Company*, 1665 (fig. 7), by Caspar Netscher, a man playing the lute is shown in a very similar pose to the figure

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36 Rubenstein 2000, 46.  
37 Finlay 1953, 54.  
38 Finlay 1953, 55. The theorbo is a kind of lute…
in *Family Making Music*. In Netscher’s painting, the lute player has his head down, looking at his fingers, and his right hand is plucking the strings just over the hole of the musical instrument. Although the lute player in Molenaer’s painting looks out toward the audience, the artist has posed the lutist as other artists of the time commonly depicted these musicians.

The lute player sits comfortably between the two sisters. His legs are crossed and his overall pose is relaxed. He does not give the impression of struggling for space or dominance with other members of the family. The tilted positioning of the lute on the figure’s lap forms a diagonal between the two young women. The young man gives the impression of plucking the lute easily and loosely in his seat. The citternist, lutist, and singer structure the left side of the family semicircle. The head of the lute player is above the head of the older sister and below the head of the standing and singing younger sister. The adolescent’s face seems less relaxed and more serious than the two women’s faces. David Smith wrote that faces in portraits are masks depicted by the artist to fulfill how a person wished to be perceived in the public eye. Molenaer is showing the lutist as serious, probably going along with the desire of the sitter.

The lute player’s clothing and location within the painting also allude to his familial position. During the seventeenth century, the lute conveyed an aristocratic and more carefree lifestyle. Despite his rather serious expression, the lute player is in the most relaxed pose of the music makers. As stated by Katherine A. McIver, the lute was common in scenes of peasants and aristocrats, and considered among the highest status after the

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40 Smith 1982, 1-12.
41 Claes JanszVisser, in McIver 2003, 158.
voice. His outfit, the most ostentatious and colorful of the family, possibly communicates a lack of duty and accountability, or a favored position in terms of inheritance. Unlike the rich, but dignified black outfit of the current adult and provider for the nuclear family, here probably the artist, the lute player as a younger brother, would not have been expected to dress in as serious or stern manner. Jan Miense Molenear’s dress conveys professionalism and responsibility. As noted by Märiet Westermann about Jacob Ochtervelt’s family portraits, the father or father-figure, would wish to be depicted in a serious and elegant black “befitting the head of the household.” After the death of parents, a younger brother would not have been required to accept liability for the family’s welfare. The bows and ribbons on his legs and shoes, for instance are ornate and rather audacious. The lute he holds, his pose, and his clothing probably suggest that he was not in a position of power within the family.

The lutist’s position within the semicircle formed by the entire family does not suggest that he has much responsibility or power over his brothers and sisters. However, he holds a central position in the musical company. His instrument compositionally connects all of the members of the musicians. His crossed right leg provides another horizontal line connecting the four other musical siblings, two on either side of him. His seated pose does not compete with the artist’s standing, sprezzaturo pose, but he does exude some significance within the group as a whole.

The girl standing behind and between the seated brothers holds a songbook in her left hand. Her right arm is bent at the elbow as she holds up her open palm to the viewer.

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42 McIver 2003. She discussed many iconographical interpretations of the lute, ranging from a high status symbol to a vanitas symbol implying transience. These will be discussed in Chapter 3.
This gesture and her partially opened mouth indicate she is singing to the group. David Schulenberg noted: “the seated woman at the center holds a music book in her lap and beats time with her right hand: she is probably singing.” Although in this quote Schulenberg was focusing on the girl’s hand gestures, he misinterpreted her pose. The girl is most likely standing. She appears to be younger than her neighboring brothers, yet, in the painting, her head is higher indicating that she is in fact standing, not sitting. Her expression is cheerful, yet subdued. Stevens also suggests that the hand gesture may signify moderation. Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten agree that a woman keeping the beat is an allusion to the virtue of moderation, and the girl embodies composure and self-control. The singer provides another layer to the musical and harmonious character of the family.

The singer is the center of the family group. She conveys harmony and provides a unifying heart to the painting. She is positioned behind the two seated brothers. Both of her hands are clearly visible behind the men. Her arms have room to bend and extend past her slight frame. Her pose is natural and composed. The singer fits comfortably into her space and she does not clash with her neighbors for control or power. Unlike the violinist, the woman singing is spatially not imprisoned. Almost the full length of the singer’s modest black and white dress can be seen between the lutist and the violoncellist. She also wears a covering over her hair, a convention of modesty. Dressed more plainly than her older sister; the girl may have wanted or been expected to appear humble, refined, and/or

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conventional. Although a younger daughter might not have needed to take on as many family responsibilities as her sister, her clothing expresses a need for synchronization and conformity. A young girl dressed in a black dress, white collar and a cap made her a smaller “version of a God-fearing Calvinist mother”. The artist may be conveying the singer’s subservient position within the family by portraying her in black and white, the color of her parents’ and oldest brother, while her other siblings wear browns and ochers.

In *Family Making Music*, the figure that is just right of the singer is shown playing the violoncello, the largest of the stringed instruments depicted. He appears to be younger than the violinist and lutist. The violoncello player’s left hand grips the neck of the musical instrument loosely. His elbow correctly extends outward in a sixty degree angle with his chest. Although his right shoulder drops forward in an unnatural fashion, his left shoulder is held straight for optimum finger movement. The thumb wraps around the back of the neck of the violoncello. His left wrist is straight but relaxed, and his fingers are curled. The young cellist holds the bow with his palm up. The bow lies directly on the strings about an inch from the bridge. The violoncello player looks as if he is really making music and, although he is not in an authoritative position amongst the family, he is contributing to the harmonious nature of the group.

Beneath the cello, pieces of music and a music book lay on the ground. Sheets of music were most typically shown in music lesson paintings as well as those featuring vocalists. The music in *Family Making Music* is under the cello but also, at the feet of the vocalist. Molenaer probably included the music to symbolize the musical and harmonious character of the family.

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48 Rubenstein 2000, 35.
49 Finlay 1953, 63.
The cello player defines the right limits of the musical part of the family. The large instrument provides a visual distinction between the musical members of the family and the three other siblings. The violoncello creates a slightly off-center vertical line that separates the painting almost in half. Compositionally, the instrument parallels and emphasizes the authoritative and commanding vertical pose of the artist.

The violoncellist leans forward and to his right, looking out toward the audience. The lean conveys cooperation and harmony. His bow hand extends in front of the singer’s body to the crossed leg of the lute player. The space required to play the violoncello accurately is considerably more than the other musical instruments. Not only is the instrument larger than the others, but the bow extension is greater. The cellist does not appear constricted by the other members of the family. Unlike the upright poses of the citternist, violinist, lutist, and singer, the youngest man bends around the neck of the violoncello in order to look at the artist or viewer. His stance shows movement in the direction of the other music players, but he does not invade or fight for their space. He seems to look out from behind the neck of the cello, willingly following the lead of his elder siblings in making music. His pleasant expression, body position, age and position as a younger sibling with less responsibility, conveys his subdued, or shy, personality. He and his oldest sister act as compositional parentheses defining the limits of the musical combo. The violoncellist’s pose is more cooperative than the older siblings.

In *Family Making Music*, everything included by the artist is significant, including props, dress, pose, possible birth order, and gestures, as discussed in this chapter. Other aspects of the painting, such as pendant portraits, architectural devices, and *vanitas* elements will be discussed in Chapter 3. References to music visually confirmed the aim
and aspirations to immortalize domestic concord. “The therapeutic effect of music…was often stressed at this time.”

Identifying the attributes of the musical instruments and linking the attributes of each musical instrument to the specific family member provide a combined interpretation of the group as a musical company and a harmonious family with each member playing his or her role.

During the seventeenth century, Dutch society emphasized mutual relationships and collective goals within family. While David Smith has argued that portraitists tried to please their clients by showing them as they wanted, the artist of *Family Making Music* visually created the family’s desires, Jan Miense Molenaer painted the family as the wanted to appear; a harmonious group in a luxurious environment. Other scholars have agreed that seventeenth century patrons had specific desires. “One who commissions a portrait implicitly presumes an audience for that selective pictorial account of salient, if sometimes imaginary, personal traits.” The group portrayed in *Family Making Music* most likely wanted to be shown as a cooperative family. As will also be seen in Chapter 2, artists illustrated their sitter’s wishes.

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Chapter 2: Family Portraiture and Economic Space

Family portraiture often strived to convey the real or imaginary prosperous lifestyle of a familial group while also attributing virtuous and domestic qualities to the sitters. Clothing, architecture, and props provided meaning within the chosen space. Economic wealth, good character, and domesticity were common themes depicted in seventeenth-century portraiture, especially family portraits. The interior space of these paintings underscored gender roles and meaningful interactions between husband and wife, parents and children, and masters and servants. Dynamic poses and spatial positions defined family members as authoritative, moderate, or submissive. Wall decorations and accoutrements, such as fruits, nuts, glass, storage chests, and pendant portraits further demonstrated the family’s desire to communicate their financial accomplishments.

Seventeenth-century portraits incorporated traditions established by previous generations and continued to experiment with iconography and subject matter. Patrons of the middle class no doubt wanted to be seen as successful and affluent, as well as modern. Ilja M. Veldman looked at the secular representations of the working middle class during the late sixteenth century and explored the transformation from spiritual images to material images.

One of the key elements in the norms of an urban population is the value attached to diligence and labor as the only road to prosperity for the middle class. Profit making, therefore, was looked on far more kindly than it had been in earlier periods.53

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Emphasizing material wealth in a domestic setting showcased the family as a flourishing and cohesive unit.

Jacob Ochtervelt is known primarily as a genre painter. Only twelve portraits by the artist are known. Two surviving family portraits included in the oeuvre of Ochtervelt, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* of 1664 (fig. 2), and *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, possibly from the 1660s (fig. 3), each show a family posed in a luxurious interior with portraits on the walls behind them. Family portraits seemed to be “a natural preference for a specialist in genre subjects,” with the opportunity to include elements of architecture, still-life, landscape, and portraiture. The size of the figures within the space, their poses and gestures, and the sitters’ dress, are all elements that contribute to the overall visual aspirations of the family portraits. The 1660s were the years of Ochtervelt’s more formidable and cohesive paintings. The paintings *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, and *Portrait of an Unknown Family* highlight “richly dressed figures, gracefully grouped in domestic interiors,” traits typical of Ochtervelt’s family portraits from this time. Perhaps not a coincidence, the bulk of signed works by the artist dates from the 1660s. Only one signed work predates 1660, and a very few postdate this decade, although he lived until 1682. Ochtervelt’s observations and interpretation of the two families demonstrate his ability to meet their desires to be shown as proper and affluent. The regular spacing between the sitters’ enhances their goal to be immortalized as wealthy Dutch citizens.

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55 Kuretsky 1979, 107. Susan Donahue Kuretsky, author of *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634-1682)*, claims that *Portrait of the Lille Family* should not be attributed to the artist because of the significant differences in style when compared to other signed or undisputed portraits. The painting falls under the category of questionable ascription and moreover cannot be accurately dated. However, for the purposes of this thesis, *Portrait of the Lille Family* will be classified as a painting by Jacob Ochtervelt.

56 Kuretsky 1979, 40.

57 Ibid.

58 Westermann 2001, 60.
gestures and arrangement of the family members reminds one of theatrical gestures and staging. The artist intentionally created a domestic stage to showcase the character of the commissioners.

*Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* 1664, by Jacob Ochtervelt, underscores the importance that seventeenth-century Dutch families placed on showing off their monetary success. The painting draws attention to the financial accomplishments of the sitters. Ochtervelt cleverly positioned the group in a triangular shape, dressed them in fashionable garments, and showed them with expensive accessories to highlight economic power. The mother stands to the left of the painting and acts as a parenthesis of the group. The father sits in the center of the group and a small child stands between him and his wife. A servant holding a child stands on the far right of the painting, acting as the other boundary. A young boy and a small girl holding a toy spaniel stand in front of the father, forming the base of the triangle. The servant looks toward the mother as the mother points to the children playing with their dog, completing the triangle. The wife and husband look out at the audience, as does the child holding the dog. The mother is the tallest member of the group and therefore, she is the most commanding figure. The design of the room and the mother’s control over the domestic realm provide an additional level of representation. The Elseviers most likely commissioned the painting out of a desire to demonstrate their unity as a family, and their fiscal rise in the Dutch social order of the seventeenth century through trade or industry.

In the 1664 Ochtervelt painting, a well-dressed family is posed in a large space, most likely in the main room of the house. The mother is the most imposing figure, standing over the other six figures standing to her left. Her left arm extends outward
motioning toward her seated husband, and her right arm points downward toward her three children standing in the foreground. One younger child holds a small dog, while the older boy pulls the animal’s ear. The other smaller, standing woman dressed in black and orange and holding a small child on the right side of the painting is most likely the family’s servant. Kuretsky claims that this figure is a wet nurse. The woman’s exposed breast gripped by the child she holds confirms this idea. The decision to include a nurse in a family portrait must have been considered as a symbol of status and supports the domestic environment controlled by the wife. “Dutch seventeenth-century women were not only wives and mothers, but also taskmasters of the servants necessary to the maintenance of the well-balanced, clean home.” Not uncommon in Dutch and Flemish group portraits of the seventeenth century, the inclusion of a servant or nurse highlighted the Dutch idea of mercantile and familial success.

The father in *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* sits quietly and unassumingly behind his children. Unlike the other, more flamboyant figures in the painting, his black outfit makes him an inconspicuous figure, though he looks toward the audience. As Märiet Westermann discussed in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, the father’s role was often selectively depicted without authoritative characteristics in paintings of interior and domestic locations. His wife is posed in the position of authority. She looms above the other family members, and is situated directly under the painting of a former patriarch. The husband sits to the right side of the interior space, amidst the children and servant. The father appears prosperous amongst the group, but the mother exemplifies financial affluence and success. “The ideal feminine home is also a wealthy

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59 Kuretsky 1979, 60.
60 Westermann 2001, 62.
home; the heroines of domesticity are, by implication, the wives of men of substance.”62

While the husband is usually associated with power over the monetary affairs of the family, the domestic dealings of the home has traditionally been ruled by the wife. In *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, the wife has clearly taken control of all transactions of the house. She is undoubtedly the head of the concentrated efforts of the family as a whole.

The mother demonstrates power over the other members of the composition. The figure does not embody subtlety or modesty. She commands the immediate attention of the viewer because of her height and central placement in the composition. She also dominates the composition through her gestures and direct gaze. She looks straight toward the audience while motioning toward the other sitters. The painting demonstrates the power of the feminine role in Dutch society. Elizabeth Honig writes of Ochtervelt’s domestic genre scenes, “Women and their spaces become the ciphers, possessed and possessing, through which a culture expresses its complacent pride in, rather than its embarrassment of, riches.”63 The mother’s pose is assuming and her dress seems extremely lavish. She embraces her stature as the head of group. She manages the interior setting and domestic domain with full control. Her pose and open stance suggests pride in her family, approval of her authority, and a satisfaction with their economic situation.

The placement of the wife is important to the overall intentions of the painting. She is positioned directly below the pendant pair portraits of a well fashioned couple. Martha Hollander argues that background paintings and portraits functioned as explanations for the

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63 Honig 1997, 199.
figures in the foreground as they visually enhanced the scene. As seen in Molenaer’s *Family Making Music*, the man identified as the artist stands with his head overlapping his mother’s portrait and assumes the position of power. He controls the composition. Similarly in *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, the woman’s proximity to the pendant portraits elevates her rank. She appears closest to her ancestors, which solidifies her as head of the household.

Furthermore, the family is clothed in rich, flowing materials. The children appear to be wearing colored satin dresses or outfits with stark white linen collars of all and hair-covers for the girls and toddlers, while the father wears a rich black overcoat. The wife’s outfit is the most extravagant and luxurious. She is draped in a long taupe velvet jacket with white fur-trim. A blue apron fits around her waist and flows to the floor. The apron appears translucent suggesting it was made of a delicate material, such as silk. As Westermann points out, the apron signifies the mother’s role as mistress of the house. The jacket and apron fit over her flowing grayish-blue dress. A gold-lined hem around the bottom of the wife’s dress accentuates the richness of the material and further elevates the heightened status of her position.

Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681) painted similar compositions with women controlling their surroundings through size and color. In *The Curiosity Seekers* (fig. 9), a woman stands under a mantel, dressed in lavish clothing and appears to be directing the scenes. She looks out toward the viewer, but slightly averts her eyes so as to not make direct eye contact. In both Ter Borch and Ochtervelt’s paintings, the artists have emphasized

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65 More about positions of the pendant portraits, their possible meaning, and the figures relationship to them will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3.
feminine individuality and virtues. Joanna Woodall writes that the seventeenth-century Dutch “naturalized the authority of different categories” of the individual, such as masculine or feminine. Both women display a calm confidence in their positions as heads of the domestic space.

Recognizable symbols, such as pendants, coats-of-arms, fruit, glassware, and ceramics, were particularly valued by artists who wanted to enhance the attributes a family wished to convey, such as high moral character, ancient roots, and ownership of luxurious goods. *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* shows an orange, an oriental rug, and a family pendant on a chain draped around the waist of the small child clinging to her mother’s dress. The wife holds the orange in her outstretched left arm, a classic way in the seventeenth century to communicate affluence, fecundity, and fruitful family relationships. A lemon also seems to sit on top of the Oriental rug hung over the table behind the group, further suggesting the economic wealth of the family. Similar Oriental carpets appeared in many Dutch portraits, genre scenes, and still-life paintings, such as *Room Corner with Curiosities*, 1712 (fig. 8), by Jan van der Heyden. The family crest on a pendant dangles from a lavishly dressed young child situated between her mother and father. The position of the pendant between husband and wife visually connects the two joined in a harmonious marriage dedicated to the prosperity and education of their family.

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68 Jan Baptist Bedaux, “Fruit and Fertility: Fruit Symbolism in Netherlandish Portraiture of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” *Simiolus*, Vol. 17, no. 2/3, (1997): 150-168. The author relates grapes to the fruitfulness of marriage and states that there is room to interpret all fruit, including apples and oranges in the same manner.
This crest may identify the family as the Elseviers. Luxury items, like those in the portraits by Jacob Ochtervelt, were commonly used emblems in seventeenth-century paintings. All of these symbols in the painting are representations of the family’s extravagance. The Elsevier family proudly displays their prosperity through their expensive accoutrements.

In *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* of 1664, the Elseviers are posed to one side of the mantel in the family’s living room. The setting of the painting is important in deciphering the layers of meaning. “The fireplace, for example, which in genre imagery can allude to sexual passion, also often carries the domestic meanings of the hearth and womanly virtue in Dutch family portraiture.” Interior architectural elements and paintings-within-paintings are included to elevate a family’s social class, whether real or imaginary. The family sits below a large tapestry hung on the right wall and a pair of smaller pendant portraits between the mantel and the wall. Kurestsky identifies the tapestry as Titianesque, with many flying putti and nude women. She acknowledges that the tapestry’s subjects may well hint at the family’s harmoniousness and fruitful nature of the couple’s marriage. A landscape painting hangs over the fireplace.

Background paintings, such as landscapes and allegorical scenes were commonly included in Dutch family portraits and genre scenes. They created spatial illusions and enhanced the affluence of the sitters. Gabriel Metsu’s (1629-1667) painted *Visit to the Nursery* (fig. 10) in 1661 with a similar composition to that of Ochtervelt’s *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*. In Metsu’s work, a woman appears to enter a sitting room to visit a

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70 Although not directly related to family portraiture, David Smith writes about marriage medals that were popular during the seventeenth century and bought to commemorate marriages in: Smith 1982, 64.
71 Diskant 1984, 414.
72 Kurestsky 1979, 60.
mother and her newborn child. The large tapestry hanging over the mantel dominates the background of the visiting room. Like *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, in *Visit to the Nursery* the figures in the foreground and their environment create a combined commentary on the prosperous atmosphere of the sitters. In the seventeenth century, “secondary pictures in art provided commentary, pictorial rather than verbal.” Artists of the Dutch Golden Age, such as Jacob Ochtervelt and Gabriel Metsu, enhanced the atmospheres of portraits and genre works by including landscape paintings.

The large amount of space that allows for the pair of portraits, tapestry, and landscape on walls and over the mantel conveys the financial success of the Elsevier family. “Dutch homes rarely had enough continuous wall space to accommodate the wider double format, although this would hardly have been a consideration for the families who lived in large double-fronted houses.” Frontage was expensive and taxes were high along Dutch streets, so most houses were only one room wide, but several rooms deep. Since having a double-wide house was a rarity in seventeenth-century Dutch residences, families that could afford them would have been anxious to show off the extra space and immortalize it in paintings. Patrons living in smaller homes might still have had themselves depicted as if they owned double wide houses. In the seventeenth century, most rooms still included beds, but very wealthy families were able to separate public and private spaces. Highlighting ample floor and wall space around a hearth without a bed implies the family was rich enough to entertain in a public area within their house. The architecture and

73 Hollander 2002 3.
75 Diskant 1984, 18.
amount of available space surrounding the figures, whether accurate or invented, suggests
wealth and an elevated status in the community.

*Portrait of an Unknown Family*, probably from the 1660s, a painting often included
in the oeuvre of Jacob Ochtervelt, also embodies a family’s desire to showcase their
financial success. It has been housed in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Lille, since 1893, and is
Figure 199, the last image included in Kuretsky’s catalogue raisonné of Ochtervelt.77
Other than the brief explanation in *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt, (1634-1682)* there
has been very little other mention of *Portrait of an Unknown Family*.

In *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, the group is gathered around the small, rug
covered table. The table does not seem to be the dining table of the family of seven. The
mother and father figures are seated at either side of the table, the mother to the right and
the father to the left, the normal gender positions in portraiture, whether family, double, or
pendant. From the sitter’s perspective women were traditional seated on the “sinister (left-
hand) or lesser side, according to theological and social formulas which valued the ‘dexter’
(right-hand) position more highly.”78 Three young children surround their mother. “When
gracing the dinner table, children were portrayed as gentle and obedient.”79 The smallest
child sits on her mother’s lap while the oldest girl clings to her mother’s skirt and the
middle girl stands to the right in front of the mother. The faces of the family members are

77 Kuretsky 1979, 107, in Fr. Cl. Lengrand, *Les Peintres flamands de genre au XVII siecle* (Brussels, 1963),
p.166 (as Tilborch). The painting appears in the second section, “Paintings of Disputed Attribution,”
suggesting that works in this part of the book should not be classified as works definitely by Ochtervelt. The
works in the second section could be copies by later artists, they could be credited to students of the affluent
artist, or the paintings might be by contemporaries of Ochtervelt. The author mentions previous literature
published by the Lille museum, and adds that C.I. Legrand attributes the family portrait to a different genre
painter, Egidius van Tilborch. Kuretsky states Legrand has convincingly argued, in a 1963 article, that
Tilborch’s style and the style of the figures in *Portrait of a Family* are the same. Without first-hand research
on the portrait’s commissioners and a full stylistic evaluation of both Ochtervelt’s and Tilborch’s techniques,
an accurate assessment of the connoisseurship is not possible.

78 Westermann, 1996, 133.
79 Rubinstein 2000, 37.
turned in the direction of the audience to capture the light entering the room from the left, but the two standing small children direct their gaze directly at the audience.

Unlike the Elsevier family portrait, the father demonstrates power over the other members of the composition. The figure embodies masculinity and displays dominance in the domestic realm. He commands the immediate attention of the viewer because of his dress, movement, and position. The father is dressed in the traditional black and white outfit made with the finest materials. This suggests both control and modesty. He leans outward from the table toward the female servant pouring his glass. The open stance with legs spread, was reserved for men. As seen in Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family) and in Portrait of an Unknown Family, the open stance suggests an air of dominance. The alignment of the husband is important to the overall intentions of the painting. He is positioned directly below the single male portrait; both wear a similarly black outfit with a long, flat white collar. The alignment of the portrait and father suggests the power and authority of the man’s position within his family. The husband is spatially related to the single portrait and suggests pride in his family and a satisfaction with their economic situation. The man’s young son looks at him as the family leader, as he gestures toward his mother, linking the marital pair.

The mother’s position is subdued and references her refined and confined position. She is dressed in a dark dress, with a colored satin apron. She also wears white collar and head covering. The mother’s clothing is modest. The woman’s forearm is exposed as she

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80 Smith 1982, 27.
82 The only image I could find is black and white, and not of very good quality. It is difficult to clearly distinguish colors of the clothing.
holds out her hand. She delicately holds a stemmed glass by the base between her index finger and thumb near the table. The woman’s expression is one of anticipation and subservience. She looks over the clutching children as she glances in the direction of her husband and the servant. Though three children are gathered around her, she has little interaction with them. Her left arm clutches the smallest child, but she seems more interested in the prospect of having her glass filled rather than her role as mother. Her domestic role as mistress and being the attentive wife of her husband seem to have been the primary concern of the sitters and artist. One of the only signs of her status is a foot warmer upon which her left foot is propped just visible beneath her satin dress.

An older boy stands over the table and is possibly a brother of the man or woman in Portrait of an Unknown Family. He is dressed too richly to be a servant. The wife does not look at all old enough to be his mother. He is the only figure who looks attentively to the woman, as if to offer the food on the metallic platter to her. The boy is pointing with his right hand to the plate and holding it with his left hand. The plate seems to hold a small amount of a fruit such as grapes, or perhaps nuts. Grapes often symbolize fertility or virginity.83 Here, the reference probably alludes to “the chastity of marital love.”84 Only a glass sits next to it. The family does not seem to be indulging in an excess of food and drink, yet all the surrounding objects project a flourishing, financial prosperity regardless of the small table.

A woman servant pours liquid into a delicate glass being held out by the family patriarch. As argued previously about Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family), the presence of a servant suggests a very wealthy middle class family who can afford expensive objects

and a servant. The servant woman’s dress is plainer and much more modest than the other figures’ apparel, and she is shown in profile rather than the frontal or three-quarter turn poses of the family members. Her skirt is coarser in texture than the wife’s or the female children’s outfits. The servant’s hair is pulled tightly under a white hair covering. She also seems to grab her apron with an unseen hand, or it is tucked in around her waist. Her apron appears much more functional than the aprons worn by the mother or her female children.

According to Liana de Girolami Cheney, the act of pouring wine may hint at two or three of the five senses: “sight, in the pouring of the wine; taste, in the drinking.” A figure pouring a liquid is most apparently associated with eating and drinking. Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) painted a women pouring liquid in The Milkmaid, 1658-60 (fig. 11). In this genre work, the artist may have posed the woman pouring to incorporate the sense of sight, taste, and sound. In Portrait of an Unknown Family, the servant pours the husband’s glass, thus alluding to the senses.

The food and dishes on the Oriental rug draped over the table convey the family’s desire to express their financial success. The majority of luxury items in Portrait of an Unknown Family surround the husband and servant. The father looks over his right shoulder toward the servant, but the servant obediently looks down toward the man’s glass and the task at hand. A silver bucket at the foot of the husband contains two carafes. One of the carafes and the container held by the servant looks to be Chinese blue porcelain. Chinese porcelain served as a reminder of the importance of trade with the East. Another jar of porcelain rests on the mantel to the left of the seascape. With the influx of luxury items from the East, Chinese porcelain would have been an immediate indication of

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86 Diskant 1984, 20.
prosperity. This could link the family to the shipping industry of Amsterdam or Rotterdam, a possible source of their wealth; however, images of foreign objects appeared often in still-lifes as well as portraits. No study of this painting and the objects within it has identified the family.

The amount of wall space surrounding the family is again telling of the wealth and success of family. Three paintings are clearly displayed on the walls behind the family. An oversized stormy seascape dominates the space over the mantel, a landscape hangs to the right of the fireplace, and the portrait showing a male figure hangs to the left. Artists such as Ludolf Backhuysen specialized in realistic seascapes like *Ships in Distress off a Rocky Coast*, 1667 (fig. 12). The swirls of the sea and the gales in the sails accentuate the menacing storm and the inevitability of death. Although overall the commissioners of *Portrait of an Unknown Family* strived to convey their prosperous lifestyle, they may have also wanted to allude to the perils connected with wealth. Large paintings were symbols of status and prosperity. It may also be another allusion to the family’s connections with the seafaring business, although no specific connections have been made.

Half of a wooden trunk is visible behind the mother. The trunk sits along the wall suggesting further space past the visible realm of the painting. “Chests were used mainly to store the housewife’s much prized linen.” In *Portrait of the Lille Family*, the linen chest parallels the mother figure’s space, in turn, advocating her domestic duties. She does not display dominant qualities, but the well-groomed children and the refined accoutrements inhabiting her space imply a well-kept household. The continuing wall is intended to spark the viewer’s imagination. The emphasis on space is a technique utilized

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88 Diskant 1984, 18.
by Ochtervelt to portray a family’s growing stature in a community. The space surrounding the mother conveys a prevailing interior feminine realm.

Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches* discussed the Dutch Golden Age in terms of economic strategies, and explored the dichotomy between the social beliefs of the people of the Netherlands during the seventeenth century and their behavior. Other authors have grabbed many of Schama’s ideas and have incorporated these into their arguments. “Pride in prosperity goes hand in hand with the realization that it is not to be squandered or taken for granted.” During the 1660s, Jacob Ochtervelt painted two portraits of families each striving to visually immortalize prosperity while maintaining a humble demeanor. Aspects of both *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* and *Portrait of an Unknown Family* draw attention to the embracing of riches by the families. The ideal of moderation was integrated into the family portraits only through their decorous poses and gestures and sober expressions.

In seventeenth-century Dutch society, the ideal family worked together to gain and maintain stability and wealth. This achievement within the Dutch class structure was commonly immortalized in family paintings and group portraits. Jacob Ochtervelt’s two family portraits, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* and *Portrait of the Lille Family*, incorporate similar techniques to show the groups’ prosperity. Positions within the interior spaces, visual alignment with wall hangings, expensive dress, and luxury items solidified the families as wealth middle class patrons. Family portraiture from the seventeenth century emphasized both the feminine and masculine realms of control within a similar

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setting. The Ochtervelt paintings highlight a collective goal: to succeed financially. The successes were “based not only on the achievements of individuals but on the concerted efforts of the family as a whole”\textsuperscript{91} with male and female taking their proper responsibilities.

\textsuperscript{91} Maarten Prak, \textit{The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 128.
Chapter 3
Portraits-within-Portraits: Harmony, Wealth, and Transience

The pendant portraits-within-portraits has had limited acknowledgement. According to David R. Smith, “pendants [portraits] generally, and generically, advertised two things: harmonious domestic life and comfortable social standing.” As discussed in Chapter 1, art historians have conventionally addressed *Family Making Music* by focusing on the foreground figures and their familial relationships in terms of harmony. As I also argued in Chapter 2, wealth and prosperity have been at the heart of the dialogue concerning Ochtervelt’s family portraits. The pendant portraits emphasize the harmony and wealth of the sitters, but furthermore, they represent the transience of life. A combined interpretation of the portraits is necessary to fully understand their inclusion in family portraits. The artists and commissioners must have had a reason for the inclusion of background portraits other than visually to call attention to the sitters.

*Family Making Music*, 1630s (fig. 1), by Jan Miense Molenaer, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, 1664 (fig. 2) and *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, possibly from the 1660s (fig. 3), both by Ochtervelt, all feature pendant portraits in the background of family portraits. As stated by Perry Chapman, the pendant portraits strengthened morals of domestic order, ancestral harmony, and a connection between the generations. Portraits-within-portraits reinforced the idea that family was to be valued. Lineage was respected

92 David R. Smith, p. 150.
93 One other example of a family portrait with pendant portraits was found in my research, but information on the portrait has been unavailable. The image was found in a newspaper. Gerrit Pietersz van Zijl (1597-1665) painted a group portrait with pendents in the background. The painting was in the Nazi collection and was restituted in 2006. For the purpose of this thesis, the image will not be addressed.
and treasured in seventeenth-century Dutch society. Sheerin Marshall has explains that “portraits reified the concept of the lineage, while portraits painted within the landscape or manor of familial holdings demonstrated the family’s material substance and status.”

They have included part of their lineage on background walls. In these three paintings, the pendant portraits immortalized generations of family members. Showing children in paintings revealed the Dutch social belief that they were destined to take over the family riches and to pass it on to following generations. The families depicted in the foreground of the paintings purposefully included the images of previous and contemporary generations to commemorate and celebrate a harmonious and prosperous relationship. Nevertheless, the depictions of previous generations also suggest the reality of fatality. “The evocation of time also signals the still life’s capacity to outlast its objects by memorializing them in paint.” The pendant portraits refer to the immortalization of lineage and mortality.

Portraits in family portraits allude to the temporal nature of life. A variety of methods were used to incorporate the idea of transience into paintings. In the seventeenth century, the people of Northern Europe placed considerable value on the temporal nature of man and the follies that ensued over indulgence and extravagance. The recurring theme was reproduced in portraits, still-lifes, landscapes, seascapes, genre paintings and religious works. Artists from France, Germany, England, and Flanders used the idea of temperance; however, the Dutch were most successful in translating the notion into a visual dialogue displayed throughout all facets of painting. In fact, a specific type of still-life painting

emerged to convey the concept of life’s impermanence. *Vanitas* paintings were commissioned as reminders of time and death.\(^98\) Although appearing in different forms in paintings, *vanitas* iconography was identified most overtly as a skull, a clock, bubbles, flowers, and just-extinguished candles.\(^{99}\) Other references to transience were more subtle and applied to the overall focus of the work. Transient iconography also appeared in landscapes and prints. Family portraits incorporated symbols of temperance, including pendant portraits.

The iconography in seventeenth-century Dutch painting can be interpreted in several ways. The representations in *Family Making Music*, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, 1664 and *Portrait of an Unknown Family* can be understood as symbols of harmony, wealth, as well as a reminder of imminent death. The accoutrements of the sitters in the foreground propose accord and riches, as well as mortality. The background portraits act in a similar way to the other accessories included in these family portraits. The artist included the pendant paintings and the families’ possessions to visually enhance the desires of the sitters. The pendant portraits must therefore be investigated as iconographic symbols.

In *Family Making Music*, Dennis Weller makes the argument that identifies the background portraits as Jan Miense Molenaer’s mother and a posthumous depiction of his father.\(^{100}\) The father’s portrait hangs to the left of a clock and the mother’s portrait hangs to the right. The father grips a skull with his right hand and holds an orb with his left. The mother holds a book while an hourglass sits on a table behind her. The sitters look over the

\(^{98}\) Eddy de Jongh and Ger Leijten 1997, 181.

\(^{99}\) E. de Jongh 1995, 82.

\(^{100}\) Weller 2002, 3. The author dates Molenaer’s fathers death to 1636, the same year the painting was made, and his mother’s death to 1652. He claims that the iconography within the pendant paintings attributes to his argument that the father is posthumous, but the mother was living at the time of the painting.
family group watchfully and lovingly. Eight other small portraits line the background wall directly below the two pendant portraits. Although barely visible, these portraits include some coats-of-arms. Questions arise when trying to incorporate the eight smaller portraits into the discussion of this chapter. Only five are fully visible behind the family group. Harry Berger, Jr. asks: “Are they portraits of those sitters?” \(^{101}\) For the purpose of this essay, the smaller portraits will not be individually examined. \(^{102}\) It seems very unlikely that the small row of portraits represents the foreground sitters, but instead, are examples of small portrait copies made to distribute to the multiple children in families. \(^{103}\) The original, large portraits of immediate ancestors go to the oldest child, while copies go to the younger children. Perhaps the eight mini portraits are the inherited legacy of the father or mother in the pendant portraits. These portraits in the painting are visual representations of the family’s lineage and act as reminders. They exist as if to say: soon you too with be just a painting on a wall.

Also unique to *Family Making Music*, two older gentlemen stand or sit on a dais behind the virginal. One of the older men presents a small oval-shaped portrait of a woman to the audience. Many art historians have indicated that the gentlemen exist in a portrait at the back the family group; \(^{104}\) however, there is a problem with this scenario. The curtain that hangs over the father’s pendant portrait hangs behind the space occupied by the two older men. Weller suggests that these men were added later and they represent Molenaer’s

\(^{101}\) Berger 2007, 164.

\(^{102}\) More research and investigation could be incorporated here, but without access to the painting, only the image, it is impossible to make out the features of these eight portraits.

\(^{103}\) William H. Wilson, *Dutch Seventeenth Century Portraiture: The Golden Age*, (Sarasota, Florida: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, 1980), Figure 10 in “Supplementary Material.”

\(^{104}\) Berger 2007, 165. He writes that these figures are arguably painted on the background, but crowd and confuse the composition. Other than taking the opposing side to Weller’s and Westermann’s arguments, there is not a clear discussion of whether or not the figures exist in the foreground, background, or somewhere in between.
half-brothers from his father’s previous marriage.\textsuperscript{105} The inclusion of the two men is problematic. They neither exist within the composition of the family painting nor on the background as the other portraits. In at least one other family portrait, Molenaer put deceased family members behind a table to differentiate them from the living.\textsuperscript{106} Weller argues that the two men were still living when the family portrait was painted. The author also states that the gentlemen are Molenaer’s half-brothers. The artist may have included the half-brothers behind the virginal to indicate their distant relationship. Molenaer did not paint the men with the other siblings, but did not include them as portraits on the wall either. The artist was trying to separate the pair without leaving them out entirely. He may also be conveying that the two gentlemen are very much alive.

One of the two gentlemen holds a small portrait of a woman. The oval portrait probably indicated a deceased mother, wife or sister.\textsuperscript{107} Weller states that the small portrait shows Molenaer’s father’s first wife, the mother of the two older men. Molenaer’s father and first wife are assumed to be posthumous when \textit{Family Making Music} was created. The question of why Molenaer chose to portray his mother as a pendant portrait arises. If the mother was still alive when the family portrait was commissioned, why was she not included in the foreground? The pendant portraits and the oval portrait show an older generation, while the foreground figures are the current generation. Probably because of age, Molenaer wished to emphasize his immediate family. The smaller scene, the two gentlemen and an oval portrait, mirrors that of the main, music-making scene.

\textsuperscript{105} Weller 2002, 2. He states that the oval portrait they hold is their posthumous mother, Cornelia Jansdr. who had died about 25 years earlier.  
\textsuperscript{106} De Jongh 1986, 215.  
\textsuperscript{107} De Jongh 1986, 274.
The symbols of harmony, such as music, musical instruments, and the beating time of the singer and the clock have also been interpreted as *vanitas* icons. The representations in *Family Making Music* suggest harmony and humanity. As explained in Chapter 1, “instruments attuned to each other are compared with souls in harmony.”\(^{108}\) The inclusion of musical instruments and the clock can also be construed as symbols “human artifice”\(^{109}\) and temperance. Katherine McIver wrote musical instruments and clocks kept real time, but were reserved for “earthly entertainment.”\(^{110}\)

Still life paintings included objects that most obviously alluded to transience.\(^{111}\) The skull and hourglass were the most commonly used and most obvious *vanitas* symbols and can be seen in many paintings. Their iconographical meaning cannot be disputed.\(^{112}\) One example is *Vanitas Still Life* (fig. 13), by Pieter Claesz. (1597-1661), which shows clear symbols of human mortality, such as the skull, violin, pocket watch. The artist’s self-reflection also dominates the composition. In *Family Making Music*, many of the same symbols were used. Molenaer also included himself in his family portrait implying his own mortality.

The skull and timepiece have also been included in David Bailly’s *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Still-Life* (fig. 14). Bailly (1584-1657) incorporated other *vanitas* symbols, such as an overturned glass, coins, bubbles and a candle that has just been extinguished, along with small portraits of posthumous relatives.\(^{113}\) The integration of portraits with *vanitas* symbols in *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Still-Life* alludes to the inclusion of the

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109 Katherine McIver 2003, 308.
110 McIver 2003, 308.
111 Westermann 1996, 164.
portraits as part of the iconographic language of temperance. Visually, this idea materializes through proximity. An hourglass slowly drains on the end of the table. Cut flowers and bubbles signified items with very short life spans.\(^{114}\) The artists used unmistakable representation of the ephemeral nature of time, but also included rarely used icons, such as portraits-within-portraits. By including a biblical phrase, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,”\(^{115}\) left no question as to the paintings meaning. David Bailly incorporated typical and experimental symbols of transience. In *Family Making Music*, Jan Miense Molenaer utilized similar iconography. Molenaer painted signs of mortality, such as a skull in the father’s portrait, an hourglass in the mother’s portrait, and a young boy with bubbles, and used the pendant portraits themselves as symbols of transience.

The young boy to the left of Molenaer blows bubbles and looks out into space. His expression separates him from the rest of the siblings. The boy appears lighthearted as he plays with his bubbles, unaware of the audience. “The contrast between the carefree world of the child and the burdensome reality of everyday life was often alluded to in the seventeenth century.”\(^ {116}\) The figure of the child and his short-lived toy hints at the painter’s motive to represent the family group as mortals. Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten wrote that blowing bubbles was a traditional connotation and metaphor for human life.\(^ {117}\) The young boy characterizes the childish behaviors while insinuating a fleeting existence. The child blowing bubbles along with the other *vanitas* symbols infer that *Family Making Music* includes an underlying transitory theme.


\(^{115}\) Westermann 1996, 59.

\(^{116}\) Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten 1997, 92-93

\(^{117}\) Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten 1997. 299.
The symbolism in the pendant portraits was common and previously established, as seen in Adriaen Thomas Key (1544-1590), *Family Group*, 1583 (fig. 16). “The head of the family has placed his hand on a skull, while the kneeling figure of a woman, gazes at him tenderly and lays one of her hands on his shoulder, the other on an hourglass.”

The father’s hand on the skull in *Family Group*, as in *Family Making Music*, proposes that the figure was deceased at the time of the commission. The addition of a posthumous figure along with the living was common in the northern Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Their inclusion further implies mortality.

The symbols depicted in *Family Making Music* were common in seventeenth-century paintings. Artist’s incorporated themes of mortality into still-lifes, genre works, self-portraits, and family portraits. Similar to the *vanitas* symbols that appear in Molenaer’s family painting, Jacob Ochtervelt’s two family portraits show representations of the transient.

In *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, two pendant portraits hang to the left of the mantel. The figures are dressed in conservative, black and white outfits and look sternly out at the audience. The pendant portraits show the prosperity of family by their real or imaginary existence. By being able to afford and incorporate portraits into their homes, the families flaunted the economic power. Society placed emphasis on wealth and prosperity in Dutch society, but they also warned of mortality. “Vanitas motif[s] are paradigmatic for the Dutch mentality of the seventeenth century, which reveled in prosperity yet was anxious about the moral consequences of wealth.”

The pendant portraits in *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* act as symbols of wealth and as symbols of mortality.

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118 Praz 1971, 209.
119 Westermann 1996, 118.
of transience. In addition, fruit, as seen on the centrally-located platter, was often considered a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and procreation in seventeenth-century portraits, but it also alluded to the temporal character of life in still-lifes because fruit spoils so fast, thus adding to the wealth and transience theme.

For the average viewer, Dutch landscapes are not typically thought to include *vanitas* symbols or hint at mortality. However, representations of transience within landscapes were subtly incorporated into compositions. “During the seventeenth century contemporary interiors provided the setting for moralistic scenes”. In Jacob van Ruisdael’s *Hilly Landscape with a Large Oak*, 1652 (fig. 15), symbols of transience are understood through the portrayed stages of the oak tree. Ruisdael included a sapling, a large oak, and logs to imply the stages of human life. Seymour Slive states moralizing readings of landscapes have been attempted based on Ruisdael’s painting and suggests “that man lives in a transient world where he is beset by sinful temptation by may hope for eternal salvation.” The landscape in *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* may include a subtle narrative structure that hints at man’s mortality. The pendant portraits of a father and mother hang to the right of a large landscape hanging over the mantel. “The figure group parallels the tempestuousness of Ruisdael-like landscape hanging beside it.” The possibility that the landscape could incorporate *vanitas* symbolism allows for the possibility that the pair portraits might also be icons of transience as well.

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120 De Jongh 1986, 184.
121 Kemp 2002, 262.
124 De Jongh 1971, 424.
*Portrait of an Unknown Family* by Jacob Ochtervelt features only one portrait of a man hanging to the left of the mantel. The lack of a pendant pair suggest that the single painting may be a posthumous sitter and that his wife is still living and depicted below or it may be a single portrait of an unmarried member of the family. The large landscape painting, the foreign articles and other accoutrements suggest the family’s desire to show off wealth. The wall paintings and decorations also allude to transience. The single portrait of a man can be included in the transitory iconography if the sitter is dead.

As previously argued in Chapter 2, large paintings created spatial illusions and visually suggested the affluence of the sitters. The architecture and amount of available space surrounding the figures, whether accurate or invented, suggests wealth and an elevated status in the community. However, the subject matter chosen for the large background paintings is also an indication to the projected comprehension of the family portrait. Specifically, in landscapes and seascapes elements of nature alluded to the futility of earthly possessions and the inevitability of death.

Stormy seascapes, or tempest scenes, often insinuated a looming death. *Portrait of an Unknown Family* shows the family sitting at a table in front of a small fireplace. A large stormy seascape hangs over the mantel. Ludolf Backhuysen’s, (1631-1708), in *Ships in a Stormy Sea off a Coast*, 1667 (fig. 12), showed a treacherous passage with perilous consequences. The overall theme of the painting expressed man’s limited time on earth:

> In these images of wreck we often see ships in various stages of disaster and imminent danger- a ship in torment on the rocks often served as a warning to companion vessels of their peril, functioning in effect as nautical momento mori.125

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The seascape in *Portrait of a Family* can be considered a sign of the transitory nature of life. As the largest painting included in the family portrait, the sea scene dominates the background. The overall premise of *Portrait of a Family* can be interpreted as prosperity as well as transience.

Renditions of foreign objects and delicacies were most likely intended to remind the viewer to practice restraint while visually manifesting decadence. A silver bucket at the foot of the husband contains two carafes. One of the carafes and the container held by the servant looks to be Chinese blue porcelain. Another jar of porcelain rests on the mantel to the left of the seascape. Similar objects appeared in *vanitas* still lifes. In Willem Kalf’s *Still Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar* (fig. 17), features a jar, a rug, a silver dish, and a half-peeled lemon, all items of luxury. On the surface of *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, a family is joined around a table with expensive objects. Underneath, the depiction of fickle objects further develops the underlying theme of uncertainty.

*Portrait of an Unknown Family* shows a family group in a large room with expensive appurtenances. The sitters in the painting presented themselves as prosperous through their accessories. The pendant portrait also acts as an accoutrement.

Cornelis Kittenstein after Dirck Hals, *Merry Company* (fig. 18), created a genre print with background pendant portraits barely visible through the crowd of over indulgers. The print has several features that appear in the family portraits with background pendant portraits. Within the print, several *vanitas* symbols are strewn about. Musical instruments on the left and a flower on the floor allude to the transient function of the print. The genre work is considered a warning against bad behavior. Although *Merry Company* is not a family portrait, the genre print does show a group fashioned at a table with portraits of a

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126 Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten, p. 179.
man and women against the background wall. The apparent transient characteristics of the print suggest that background portraits were included in the iconography of humanity and its follies.

Pendant paintings acted as reminders of the transient nature of life in seventeenth-century Dutch family portraits. The pair portraits enhanced the characteristics of the foreground figures, but they also existed as separate iconographical symbols of uncertainty. “Matched portraits or pendant pairs were generally the most highly evaluated type of portrait in wealthy homes.”

So, why were there not more pendant portraits shown in family portraits of the seventeenth century? The pair portraits are included in the intrinsic theme of the paintings. They should be thoroughly investigated as symbols of lineage and transience.

Art historians have stated that pendant portraits advertised harmonious domestic life and comfortable social standing, but these portraits with portraits need to be approached as a tool for immortalizing lineage and warning of transience as well as conveying harmony and wealth. No scholars have approached the issue directly. They have taken one stance, either harmony or transience, not both. This chapter has been about looking at it from both points of view.

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Conclusion

In this study of Baroque Dutch family portraits with background pendant portraits, we have examined three paintings. Artists painted numerous family portraits for the middle class during the seventeenth century. Only a handful of family portraits set in interiors in which other portraits painted into the background were found. This composition was rarely used by artists, and has received little attention. The scholars who have written about the paintings have examined them with a narrow focus, either interpreting the family portraits as familial harmony or familial prosperity and wealth. This thesis has attempted to add another dimension to the literature of family portraits. I examined the family portraits with an analysis, that addressed symbolization of harmony, wealth, and transience. *Family Making Music, Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, and *Portrait of an Unknown Family* have incorporated traditional imagery with experimental representations. Family portraiture often attempted to convey the real or imaginary harmonious and prosperous lifestyle of a familial group while also attributing domestic qualities to the sitters. Gestures and poses, objects, clothing, architecture, and other paintings provided meaning within the chosen space. The pendant portraits accentuate the harmony and wealth of the sitters, and furthermore, they represent mortality and the transience of life. A combined interpretation of the portraits was necessary to fully understand their inclusion in the three studied family portraits.

Musical instruments were traditional symbols that conveyed familial harmony, as well as wealth and transience. In *Family Making Music*, the musical instruments were used to suggest several levels of meaning. In the first chapter, the combination of arguments by David Smith, Märiet Westermann, Harry Berger, Jr., and Dennis Weller prove the
interpretation of the family portrait. Each musical instrument points to specific characteristics. Each musical instrument’s attributes links the group as a musical company and a harmonious family. The group portrayed in *Family Making Music* wanted to be shown as a cooperative and unified family. Props, dress, pose, possible birth order, and gestures included by the artist were significant in the harmonious reading of the painting.

Dennis P. Weller’s idea that the group depicted in *Family Making Music* was in fact Jan Miense Molenaer and his siblings is not well documented, but his claim allows for a different interpretation of the painting. Weller’s identification of the sitters was based on primary birth and death certificates of the oldest and youngest members of the family. It seems likely that the background pendant portraits were the parents of Molenaer, but the eight smaller portraits raised many questions that still remain unanswered. The figure of the artist in the painting was compared to a signed self-portrait by Molenaer. The facial features in both paintings showed many similarities and it is probable that *Family Making Music* is in fact a self-portrait of the artist and his siblings.

Economic wealth and domesticity were depicted in Jacob Ochtervelt’s seventeenth-century family portraits. In *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)* and *Portrait of an Unknown Family*, the interior space underscored the roles of mothers and fathers and highlighted meaningful interactions between parents and children. Susan Donahue Kuretsky, Klaske Muizelaar, and Derek Phillips have attempted to advance the research on seventeenth-century portraiture, particularly by Jacob Ochtervelt. The authors honed in on the overlying thought of prosperity in Ochtervelt’s family portraits.

Chapter 3 attempted to include the background pendant portraits in the language of iconography as representations of mortality and *vanitas* symbolism. Pendant portraits

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128 Weller 2003, p. 3.
acted as reminders of the fleeting nature of life in seventeenth-century Dutch family portraits. The paired paintings helped to develop the characteristics of the figures in the foreground and acted as separate iconographical symbols of uncertainty. All three paintings discussed in this chapter included many icons of transience, harmony, and wealth. The inclusion of pendant portraits within the composition indicates their importance in seventeenth-century Dutch family portraiture.

Scholars have declared that pendant portraits expresses harmonious domestic life and a contented social prosperity, but these portraits within portraits need to be approached as a tool for immortalizing lineage and warning of transience as well as expressing harmony and wealth. Tradition and economics contributed to the collective representations in *Family Making Music*, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, and *Portrait of an Unknown Family*. Were the compositions of these family portraits specifically dictated by the sitters, or were portrait painters allowed a certain amount of symbolic or artistic license? Were the pendant portraits included to balance the composition, or did Molenaer and Ochtervelt suggest their inclusion for iconographic reasons? These portraits-within-portraits deserve further investigation to fully understand their inclusion in so few seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.
Bibliography

Books


**Articles**


Further Sources


Figure 1. Jan Miense Molenaer, *Family Making Music*, 1636
Figure 2. Jacob Ochtervelt, *Family Portrait (The Elsevier Family)*, 1664
Figure 3. Jacob Ochtervelt, *Portrait of the Lille Family*, possibly from the 1660s
Figure 4. Jan Miense Molenaer, *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player*, 1635
Figure 5. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Duet*, 1635-36
Figure 6. Jan Miense Molenaer, detail of *Woman at Her Toilet, 1633*
Figure 7. Caspar Netscher, *Musical Company*, 1665
Figure 8. Jan van der Heyden, *Room Corner with Curiosities*, 1712
Figure 9. Gerard ter Borch, *The Curiosity Seekers*, 1660
Figure 10. Gabriel Metsu’s (1629-1667) *Visit to the Nursery*, 1661
Figure 11. Jan Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, 1658-60
Figure 12. Ludolf Backhuysen, *Ships in Distress off a Rocky Coast*, 1667
Figure 13. Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas Still-Life*, 1630s
Figure 14. David Bailly, *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Still-Life*, 1651
Figure 15. Jacob van Ruisdael, *Hilly Landscape with a Large Oak*, 1652
Figure 16. Adriaen Thomas Key (1544-1590), *Family Group*, 1583
Figure 17. Willem Kalf, *Still Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar*, 1669
Figure 18. Cornelis Kittenstein, after Dirck Hals, *Merry Company*, mid-1600s