

The Currier Museum of Art acquires a long-lost painting by
Judith Leyster, a pioneering Dutch woman artist.

Only recently rediscovered, Leyster's *Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat* joins the permanent collection of the
Currier Museum of Art.



Judith Leyster, *Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat*, around 1630.
Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire.

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Judith Leyster was the first woman to be admitted to a professional artistic guild. She was also one of the most expressive and innovative painters of the 17th century. Alan Chong, director of the Currier Museum, states: “The acquisition of this innovative painting by Judith Leyster fulfills our wish to highlight an important woman artist in our historical collection. The Currier Museum owns powerful works of art by contemporary women, including Joan Mitchell, Marisol, and Faith Ringgold, but this is the Currier’s first work by a woman painter from the 17th century.”

Leyster mastered an original style to capture scenes of everyday life. Her quick brushwork perfectly suits figures which appear in motion. In this painting, the boy’s tilted head and open mouth seem spontaneous. Moreover, the subject of a laughing boy holding a bunch of grapes and a hat is a unique subject in art history, which suggests that it was a scene the artist saw.

An exceptionally rare artist

Fewer than twenty works can be securely attributed to Judith Leyster. During the Renaissance and Baroque eras, women were denied the same opportunities allowed men. Along with the Italian painter Artemisia Gentilleschi and the Dutch still-life artist Rachel Ruysch, Judith Leyster was one of a handful of women to break the gender restrictions of her time. Leyster was highly praised in the official histories of the Dutch city of Haarlem.

Red Skelton's comic painting

The famed TV comedian Red Skelton owned *Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat* in the 1950s, no doubt drawn to the boy's lively and humorous expression. The painting was given to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1955, but was sold in 1977.

The painting was lost for forty years until it appeared earlier this year, when it was discovered by the noted Dutch dealer Salomon Lilian. "When I first saw the painting, I was mesmerized by its exceptional quality and immediately fell in love with it," says Lilian. "My only concern was that the right side of the face seemed restored. However, when we cleaned the painting, a perfectly preserved face was revealed under the old restoration."

Frima Fox Hofrichter, professor of art history at Pratt Institute and the principal expert on Judith Leyster, confirms the attribution to Leyster. She points out strong connections in the painting, of shadows in the face and fingers, to signed works by the artist.

An artist couple reunited at the Currier Museum of Art

A few years after *Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat* was completed, Judith Leyster married the Dutch painter Jan Miense Molenaer. The Currier Museum already owns a painting by Molenaer, *Card Players at an Inn*, providing an ideal context for the Leyster work.

Kurt Sundstrom, senior curator at the Currier Museum, says: "Although Jan Molenaer was a talented painter of everyday life, his wife, Judith Leyster, was obviously superior at capturing the spontaneity of human behavior. We are proud that the Currier Museum can exhibit the works of a prominent artist couple side by side."



Jan Molenaer, *Card Players at an Inn*, 1635. Currier Museum of Art.
This was painted around the time Judith Leyster and Molenaer were married.



Judith Leyster, *Self-portrait*, around 1630. National Gallery of Art, Washington.
This self-portrait shows the artist at the time she painted *A Boy Holding Grapes and a Hat*.

About the Currier Museum of Art

The [Currier Museum of Art](https://www.currier.org) is an internationally renowned art museum located in Manchester, New Hampshire. The museum features paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, and photographs, including works by Monet, Picasso, O’Keeffe, Hopper, and Wyeth. It presents exhibitions, tours, art classes, and community programs year-round. Two houses designed by [Frank Lloyd Wright](https://www.franklloydwright.com) are part of its permanent collection.

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