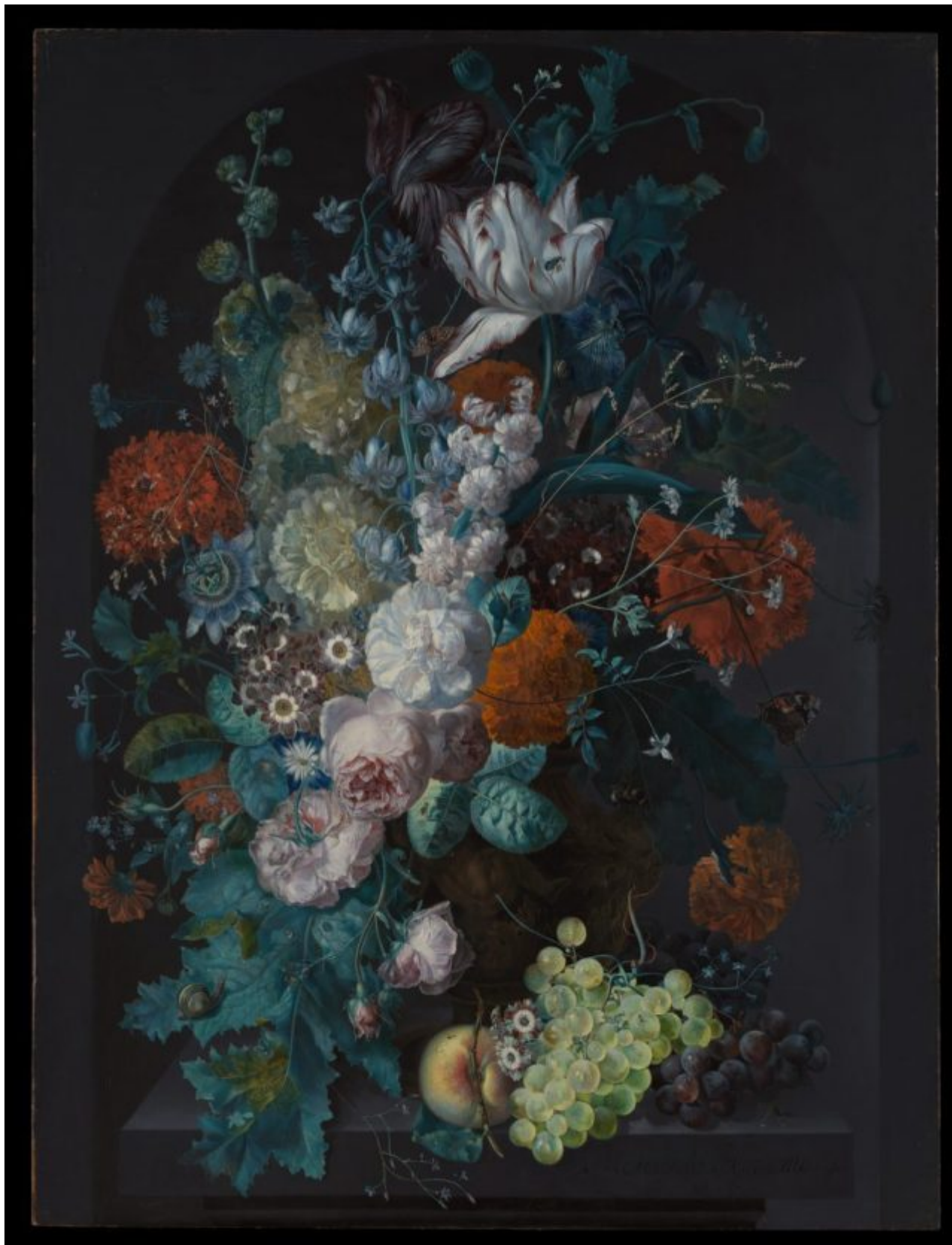


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The Must See Work in New York Right Now

Margareta Haverman is the highlight at the Met



Margareta Haverman, *A Vase of Flowers* (1716). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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In January 1971, on the heels of the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the US House of Representatives, *ARTnews* magazine published Linda Nochlin's essay "[Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?](#)" This ground-breaking cover story helped inaugurate the field of feminist art criticism, launched a generation of feminist artists, and kicked off a radical shift in the way art history is researched, analysed and taught.

Today that shift is visible everywhere—even at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's historical show of Dutch Golden Age treasures, titled "[In Praise of Painting: Dutch Masterpieces at the Met](#)" (until 4 October 2020).

Part of the genius of Nochlin's essay was the way the pioneering author detailed the misogynistic strictures that for centuries made it "impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence or success on the same footing as men". Among those structural disadvantages was the legal injunction that prohibited women from painting the nude figure.

No access to nude models, of course, meant generations of women were barred from painting large-scale historical subjects, which were reserved for men. Those hardy enough to withstand the professional demotion fell into genre painting instead. At the Met, a single picture by [Margareta Haverman](#), the prosaically titled *A Vase of Flowers*, compresses that history into the form of a raucous botanical fantasia.

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What we know about Haverman is as instructive as it is brief. Municipal records show she was the daughter of a schoolmaster who moved from Breda to Amsterdam. Her father persuaded the notoriously secretive flower painter [Jan van Huysum](#) to take her on as a pupil. She moved to Paris around 1720, married an architect, and in 1722 was elected a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.

She was only the second woman to be appointed but a year later her name disappeared from the academy records—Van Huysum accused her of a "misdeed," which many have speculated meant he said she had counterfeited the work which had led to her acceptance.

If Haverman's "reception piece"—as the works presented by new members to the academy were termed—looked anything like *A Vase of Flowers*, it was a doozy. A spectacular arrangement of flowers and fruit, in which she used innovative pigments such as Prussian blue and Naples yellow, the bouquet on view at the Met could never have existed in real life. Roses, tulips, hollyhocks, irises, marigolds and poppies do not bloom at the same time, yet here they all are, massed together in a magnificent utopian flourishing.

Paired with a lemony peach, and a cluster of red and white grapes, Haverman's flowers depict Dutch Golden Age opulence with pitch-perfect brio. In 17th-century Holland, the flowers that make up the artist's impossible bouquet would certainly have cost far more than their painted facsimile.

According to Nochlin, the motto for women artists until the 20th century might as well have been: "Always a model but never an artist". But this was certainly not the case for Haverman. *A Vase of Flowers* is one of only two known existing works by the artist (the other is in the [National Gallery of Denmark](#)) and the only painting by an early-modern Dutch woman artist in the Met's collection. New York audiences should count themselves lucky to get an eyeful of such technical mastery among Haverman's sprays of flowers, along with a brief glimpse of what might have been.