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Man with a Book

Ferdinand Bol
(Dordrecht 1616 – 1680 Amsterdam)

1644

oil on canvas

85.3 x 70.2 cm

signed in dark paint, lower right, along woodgrain
of bookstand: “F Bol,” followed by what appears
to read “Fecit”

FB-100

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In a bare, darkened interior, an elegantly dressed man sits at a table before an open book. Paused in his reading, he distractedly turns the cord of his collar between his fingers as his left hand rests on the book's pages. Light catches the buttons and right sleeve of his fur trimmed *tabard*, a sixteenth-century garment associated with learning and the scholarly tradition, and delicately accents the refinements of his dress.^[1] The sitter's plush black beret sits on soft waves of long hair and gently casts a shadow over the left side of his slightly blushed face. Bol rendered the man's features with careful contrasts of light and dark, modeling his form against the deep brown background. The man's considered state of intellectual contemplation, his sophisticated, historicizing costume, and the books lining the back wall situate him within the pictorial tradition of the scholar in his study.^[2]

Images of a scholar in his study were popular in the seventeenth century. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), with whom Bol studied in the late 1630s and early 1640s, treated the theme a number of times, as did Gerrit Dou (1613–75).^[3] For his image, Ferdinand Bol relied on the compositional model provided by Rembrandt in his 1635 etching of Johannes Uytenbogaert (**fig 1**), in which the prominent Remonstrant minister, dressed in a similar *tabard* and a black skullcap and seated before a table and large opened book, has paused from reading.^[4] Dou also followed this compositional model in the Leiden Collection's *Scholar Interrupted at His Writing* (see GD-102), but he situated the elderly scholar in a more elaborate, defined setting containing the attributes of his profession.^[5] Finally, the work's warm brown palette and chiaroscuro, which Bol achieved by building up the composition from light to dark, attests to the training he received with Rembrandt.^[6]

Although Bol based his composition on Rembrandt's portrait of Johannes Uytenbogaert, the character of his work differs considerably from its model. The scholar in Bol's painting is a young man, his skin untouched by the wear of time, and he sits in a study devoid of all but the most essential attributes of the scholar: his books. Most significantly, instead of gazing out at the viewer, the scholar stares off to the side, allowing his thoughts to turn inward as he reflects upon the words on the page. The man's preoccupied gesture reinforces this state of reflection and concentration. Bol's careful depiction of the man's features, the pages of the book, the soft texture of the fur collar, and the deep red of the tablecloth give added poignancy to this sensitive and original contribution to the tradition of the scholarly portrait.

The elegance of the sitter's costume, including his jeweled, trimmed beret, or bonnet, is similar to that in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* from 1640 in the National Gallery, London.^[7] Bol seems to have been inspired by the refined character of Rembrandt's dress, which he combined with elements of the traditional academic costume. Bol's

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Jan Uytenbogaert*, 1635, etching and burin, 22.3 x 18.3 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1943.3.7099



Fig 2. Ferdinand Bol, *An Astronomer*, 1652, oil on canvas, 127 x 135 cm, Presented by Miss E.A. Bennett, 1862, National Gallery, London, NG679, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY



interest in historicizing costumes is also evident in the inventive portraits that he produced in the 1640s and 1650s, such as the Leiden Collection's *Self-Portrait, behind a Parapet* and *Man with a Fur-Trimmed Hat* (see FB-107 and FB-105).^[8]

Bol depicted scholars on two more occasions in the late 1640s and early 1650s, in works in the Hermitage and the National Gallery, London.^[9] He maintained the basic compositional arrangement of *Man with a Book*, but he depicted these latter scholars at nearly full-length and turned in the viewer's direction. In the National Gallery's *Astronomer* (**fig 2**), executed in 1652, Bol included a more expansive interior. The scholar's table contains both celestial and terrestrial globes, along with large books, which are casually propped up against one another.^[10] The astronomer pauses with his hand on his chin, an expression of concentrated intellectual activity that recalls that of the scholar in *Man with a Book*. In each instance, Bol combined his sensitive modeling of facial features with subtle, unconscious gestures to convey the inner life of his protagonists as they ponder the implications of ideas gained from their scholarly activities

- Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 2017

Endnotes

1. The *tabard*, which had fallen out of fashion by the end of the sixteenth century, was retained as the official dress of choice for academics—and ministers—in the seventeenth century. Seen as old-fashioned, it was frequently worn by scholars in portraits, such as the series of engraved portraits of Leiden University professors published by Johannes Meursius in 1609. The beret, or bonnet, was similarly associated with the scholarly tradition. See Marieke de Winkel, “Eene der deftigsten dragten’: The Iconography of the *Tabbaard* and the Sense of Tradition in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Portraiture,” *Beeld en Zelfbeeld in de Nederlandse Kunst 1550–1750, Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 46 (1995): 146–66; and Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt’s Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 27–50.
2. See Volker Manuth, *Wisdom, Knowledge, and Magic: The Image of the Scholar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Exh. cat. Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen’s University) (Kingston, 1997).
3. For Rembrandt, see, for example, *Portrait of a Man at a Writing Desk*, 1631, oil on canvas, 104.5 x 92 cm, Hermitage, St. Petersburg; *A Scholar, Seated at a Table with Books*, 1634, oil on canvas, 145 x 134.9 cm, Národní Galerie, Prague. Joshua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* (The Hague, 1982–90), 2: A44, A95. For Dou, see for example, GD-102; Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis) (New Haven, 2000), 70–1, no. 4.
4. Rembrandt had previously depicted Uytenbogaert in a painting of 1633, in which the minister stands before a table and a large opened book. *Portrait of Johannes Uytenbogaert*, 1633, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. In the seventeenth century, the black skullcap was associated with ecclesiastics and scholars. See Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt’s Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 40–42.
5. These attributes included writing instruments and a globe; he is also surrounded by *vanitas* symbols, such as the skull and hourglass. See, for example, GD-102; Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, 2000–1) (New Haven, 2000), 70–71, no. 4.
6. Bol’s application of paint was consistently smooth throughout the canvas, except for the jewels on the beret, which have been applied with low impasto. This information comes from the technical notes compiled by Annette Rupprecht and Nancy Krieg.
7. See the essay for FB-107 (fig. 1) for Bol’s reliance on Rembrandt’s model. Bol made a copy after this painting around 1640, which is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The beret worn by Bol’s scholar was inspired by the one worn by Rembrandt in the 1640 image. It was an early sixteenth-century

element of dress, and is distinguished from other berets for its jewels and gold trim. At the same time, however, the beret (in its more modest manifestation) was also considered an element of academic dress and retained in the seventeenth century for academic doctors and scholars of the law, typically for ceremonial purposes. See Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 36–39, 164–69.

8. Bol explored different character types during the period after he left Rembrandt's studio, depicting, in half-length, fashionably dressed men who often wear a black beret and a gold chain or medallion and lean against a balustrade. Bol closely followed this format in his self-portraits, but he also expanded his approach in his portraits and the group of *tronies* he produced of men in oriental costume, sometimes wearing turbans or elaborate helmets. In the past, scholars have often regarded FB-100 as a self-portrait of Bol. Albert Blankert dismissed this claim in his monograph on the artist, arguing that the man bears no apparent resemblance to known images of Bol. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 57–59, 121, nos. 60–65, 67, 72–75. Bol also adapted the composition of FB-100 for one of his formal portraits from this same year: *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1644, oil on canvas, 96.3 x 79 cm, Städelsches Museum, Frankfurt; see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. 98.
9. *Old Man with a Globe*, ca. 1645, oil on canvas, 122 x 98 cm, Hermitage, St. Petersburg (see the essay for FB-105, fig. 3); *An Astronomer*, 1652, oil on canvas, 127 x 135 cm, The National Gallery, London. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 121–22, nos. 69 and 70.
10. The globes served as attributes of intellectual study, and were often depicted in scholarly portraits, including the Leiden Collection's *Scholar Interrupted at His Writing* (GD-102), as well as Godfrey Kneller's *Scholar in His Study* (GK-100).

Provenance

- Miles Hammett Prance (d. 1876),^[1] Branch Hill, Hampstead, London; by descent to Miles Henry Prance; by descent to Miles Herbert Prance (sale, Lady [Clara Coltman] Vyvyan et al., Christie's, London, 28 June 1935, no. 103 [to Frank T. Sabin, London, for £294]).
- [Frank T. Sabin, London, until at least 1936].
- [Daniël Katz, Dieren] (sale, Viscount Bollingbroke et al., Christie's, London, 10 December 1943, no. 147 [to Mendelssohn for £178]); (sale, Christie's, London, 23 January 1953, no. 120 [to Van der Kar]).
- J. de Mul, Brussels (his sale, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13–14 October 1953, no. 317).
- [J. F. Minken, Amsterdam and London, by 1954].
- Private collection, The Netherlands (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 25 January 2007, no. 73; [to Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam]).

- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Provenance Notes

1. Miles Hammett Prance was a London-based attorney, as were his son and grandson. A memoir written about Prance by his London legal association includes the following note about his art collection: “Mr. Prance’s favorite relaxation, to which he devoted many of his early vacations, consisted in making himself acquainted with the chief galleries of pictures in England and on the Continent, and, by the aid of a correct eye and a retentive memory, he acquired, for an amateur, a considerable knowledge of the works and characteristics of the great painters. He gratified this taste, also, by making a small but valuable collection of paintings of ancient masters.” See John Savill Vaizey, *The Institute, London: Memoirs of Former Members* ([London], 1895–1907), 136–38.

Exhibition History

- Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, “Oude kunst uit het besitz van den internationalen handel,” 1936, no. 13 [lent by Frank T. Sabin, London].
- Stockholm, National Museum, “Rembrandt och hans tid/Rembrandt and His Age,” 2 October 1992–6 January 1993, no. 73 [lent by a private collection].
- Kyoto, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, “Communication: Visualizing the Human Connection in the Age of Vermeer,” 25 June–16 October 2011; Miyagi, The Miyagi Museum of Art, 27 October–12 December 2011; Tokyo, Bunkamura Museum of Art, 23 December 2011–14 March 2012, no. 5 [lent by the present owner].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, August 2015–August 2016 [lent by the present owner].
- Wellesley, Davis Museum at Wellesley College, on loan with the permanent collection, 1 August 2017–present [lent by the present owner].

References

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- Van Hall, Hermine. *Portretten van Nederlandse beeldende kunstenaars*. Amsterdam, 1963, 30, no. 9.
- Ernst Brochhagen and Brigitte Knüttel, *Katalog der Alte Pinakothek, III: Holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1967), 18, under no. 609.
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Originally published as *Ferdinand Bol, 1616–1680: een leerling van Rembrandt*. The Hague, 1976.

- Görel Cavalli-Björkman, ed. *Rembrandt och hans tid: Människan i Centrum / Rembrandt and His Age: Focus on Man* (Exh. cat. Stockholm, National Museum) (Stockholm, 1992), 233, no. 73.
- Hirschfelder, Dagmar. *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin, 2008, 282 n. 87.
- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. “Man with a Book.” In *Human Connections in the Age of Vermeer*. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Daniëlle H. A. C. Lokin, 46–48, no. 5. Exh. cat. Kyoto, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Miyagi, The Miyagi Museum of Art; Tokyo, Bunkamura Museum of Art. London, 2011.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with tacking margins almost entirely removed, has been lined. Cusping along all four edges indicates the original dimensions have been retained. There are two red wax collection seals and a 1936 Rijksmuseum exhibition label along the stretcher reverse but no stencils or import stamps.

A light-colored, radio-opaque ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The image has been constructed with glazes in smoothly applied opaque layers and with areas of low impasto along the band of jewels on the figure's cap. Reticulation through the figure's face is due to medium rich application of paint by the artist.^[1] Overall, the sense of depth, volume and modeling remains strong.^[2]

The painting is signed in dark paint along the lower right corner, along the woodgrain of the bookstand.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. The images reveal a minor compositional change to the figure's proper right hand, which includes shifts in position of the thumb, pointer, and upper contour of the wrist.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2007. It is in good condition despite areas of abrasion through the dark drapery and background and is in an excellent state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. According to 2007 private conservation treatment notes.
2. Despite condition issues.