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Portrait of Conradus Viëtor

Frans Hals
(Antwerp 1582/83 – 1666 Haarlem)

1644
oil on canvas
82.6 x 66 cm
signed in monogram and dated in dark paint,
upper right: “FH / M CONRADVS VIETOR /
ÆTATIS 56 / Ao 1644”
FH-101

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Conradus Viëtor, a Lutheran preacher from Aachen, was born there in 1588 and died in Haarlem in 1657. He served the Lutheran community in Haarlem for forty years, having joined the small Lutheran community there on 1 May 1617. The humanist name Viëtor, or Vitor, is a Latinized form of the German and Dutch names for a cooper (barrel maker), so it is likely that Viëtor was born Konrad Fassbinder or Küfer. Frans Hals's portrait, dated 1644, is inscribed with Viëtor's name and age, fifty-six. The portrait was engraved by Jonas Suyderhoef (ca. 1613–86) shortly after the sitter's death in 1657 (**fig 1**).^[1]

Viëtor arrived in Haarlem at a significant moment in the political and religious ferment of the early seventeenth century. Until just prior to his arrival, the city council had forbidden Lutheran worship, a decree it had instituted in 1596. Although the immigration of Lutherans from Antwerp and Germany was generally regarded as advantageous for the economic well-being of the Dutch Republic, conflicts between Calvinists and Lutherans (which had been a serious problem in Antwerp before 1585) were viewed as potential threats to its stability.^[2] Other officially Reformed cities and towns of the Northern Netherlands similarly discouraged Lutherans and other Protestant sects from worshiping in their communities. In 1615, however, the Haarlem city council reconsidered this ban and allowed the Lutherans to open a “public” church.

Evidently, however, Viëtor was not one to calm the waters of Protestant dissent. Within months of becoming the Lutheran preacher in Haarlem (where the previous one had been shared with Lutherans in Leiden and The Hague), Viëtor entered into a contentious power struggle within his small congregation. In March 1618 the church council, the General Consistory in Amsterdam, renewed his contract only under outside pressure. By December of that year he embroiled himself in another heated issue, the right of a man to hit his wife (as had a member of his congregation), which Viëtor defended on the basis of Scripture. His position flew in the face of Dutch custom, and Viëtor found himself in trouble with the church council as well as with some of his parishioners. In 1619 he was sent to Leiden as a second preacher for six months, a cooling-off period after which the question of his return to Haarlem was to be resolved. In the end, Viëtor's stature as a properly appointed representative of the Lutheran Church trumped the marks against him. Forty-nine women of Haarlem's Lutheran community, in fact, wrote a petition in support of Viëtor to the General Consistory in Amsterdam, dated April 16 [1620].^[3]

Numerous accounts testify to Viëtor's combativeness at later dates. He frequently tested the patience of his Dutch Reformed counterparts and the city council of Haarlem. For example, during the suppression of Remonstrants (followers of the

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jonas Suyderhoef, engraving after Frans Hals, *Conradus Vietor*, 1657, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.8066

Protestant theologian Jacobus Arminius [1560–1609]) from 1618 onward, Viëtor placed himself in the vanguard of Lutheran preachers soliciting Remonstrant converts, going so far as to distribute Arminian tracts in 1624.^[4] He also opposed the Anabaptist argument against infant baptism in publications of 1628 and later on. Although now remembered mainly for his provocative opinions, Viëtor must have been seen by the Lutheran community in the Netherlands as an indefatigable defender of its faith during a difficult time in its history.

Hals's portrait of Viëtor is characteristic of his work during the mid-1640s in its restrained palette and quiet composition, and in the sitter's sober expression. The painter had a remarkable gift for characterization, and presumably the mixture of thoughtfulness, sincerity, and perhaps some anxiety that might be discerned in Viëtor's features faithfully reflects his personality. The pose and expression found here are by no means conventional for portraits of preachers, as is clear from comparisons with the many more standardized portraits of religious figures by other Dutch artists, and Hals's own portrait, dated 1639, of the Reformed preacher Hendrick Swalmius (Detroit Institute of Arts).^[5]

The strong modeling of the face, despite the use of broad strokes and loose touches to suggest highlights, shadows, hair, ruddy flesh and so on, is entirely consistent with Hals's autograph works of about the same time. The virtuoso treatment of the hands cradling a Bible seems to suggest both resolve and slight nervousness. Hals managed to evoke the different surface qualities of flesh, paper, leather and cloth with exceptional economy. The highlights and shadows in the ruff re-create its delicacy and volume; the collar's recession is effectively conveyed at a proper viewing distance. As usual, the background plane is neutral but enlivened by the sitter's shadow and shifting textures. The notice at the lower left on Suyderhoef's print, "F. Hals pinxit" ("painted by F. Hals"), seems unnecessary when one appreciates the sheer quality of the painting, but, in fact, much of what Hals achieved was impossible for Suyderhoef to reproduce in his engraving.^[6]

The portrait is thought to have been acquired by John Stuart (1713–92), 3rd Earl of Bute, and to have descended in his family until its sale in 1994. Bute was one of the great British collectors of the eighteenth century, whose Netherlandish pictures included many landscapes and genre scenes but very few Dutch portraits.^[7]

- Walter A. Liedtke, 2017

Endnotes

1. Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–74), 3: 78, wrongly asserts that the inscription on Suyderhoef's print gives biographical information about the sitter. Instead, it is a generic text suitable for a preacher and praises his spirituality.
2. See Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), 374–76.
3. As explained in detail in Jo Spaans, “Negenenveertig Haarlemse Mirjams: Over het aandeel van vrouwen in de moeilijkheden rondom de Lutherse predikant Conrad Viëtor,” *Nederlands Archief voor Keurgeschiedenis* 67 (1987): 1–14.
4. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), 395. This was undoubtedly meant to reveal parallels in the views of Luther and Arminius.
5. Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–74), 3: no. 126; 2: pl. 204, engraved seven or eight years later by Suyderhoef.
6. Claus Grimm, in various publications (see References) has described this portrait as a workshop product, without much explanation. As in dozens of other cases, this designation is widely regarded as unconvincing.
7. See Francis Russell, *John, 3rd Earl of Bute: Patron and Collector* (London, 2004).

Provenance

- Presumably acquired by John Stuart (1713–92), 3rd Earl of Bute, for Luton Park, Bedfordshire; by descent to John Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute (1847–1900) until at least 1934.
- Lord Robert Crichton-Stuart, by 1949.
- (Sale, Christie's, New York, 18 May 1994, no. 85).
- (Sale, Christie's, London, 2 December 2008, no. 19 [Johnny van Haften, London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- London, Bethnal Green Branch Museum, “The Collection of Paintings Lent for Exhibition by the Marquis of Bute, K. T.,” 1883, no. 94; Glasgow, 1884, no. 69; Manchester, 1885, 27, no. 180.

- Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, August 2009–January 2012.
- Istanbul, Sabancı Üniversitesi Sakıp Sabancı Müzesi, “Where Darkness Meets Light . . . Rembrandt and His Contemporaries—The Golden Age of Dutch Art,” 21 February–10 June 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, June 2012–March 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].

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Versions Engraved

1. Jonas Suyderhoef (1613–86) after Frans Hals, *Portrait of Conradus Viëtor*, 1657, engraving (in reverse), inscribed *F. Hals pinxit. I. Suyderhoef sculpt* (Hollstein, XXVIII, no. 127), Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, P.8957-R.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of fine-weight, plain-weave fabric with tacking margins removed, has been lined. Cusping along all four edges indicates the original dimensions have been retained. A hand-lettered inscription is located along the lining reverse, and three labels, a stencil, and chalk inscriptions are located along the stretcher. There are no wax seals or import stamps along the lining or stretcher.

A warm orange-brown-colored ground, possibly a double ground, has been applied. Under magnification, large white particles are visible along the ground layer surface and through the surface of thinly painted passages.^[1]

The portrait was painted directly. The figure's face and hair appear to have been painted or left in reserve before the hat was painted. The flesh tones appear to be painted directly with some wet-into-wet paint. Areas of shadow and contours of forms are sometimes painted extremely thinly, intentionally allowing the colored ground to continue to show at the surface. The background gray tones are extremely thin. Thicker passages of light-colored paint, which surround and help anchor the figure in space, were painted after the figure. The costume and hat are painted rather thinly.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images, in the X-radiograph, or as pentimenti.

The painting has not undergone conservation since its acquisition in 2008 and remains in a good state of preservation.^[2]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. A phenomenon previously noted in Carol Christensen and Michael Palmer, "Deciphering artist's intent in a late portrait by Frans Hals," AIC Paintings Specialty Group postprints, 1994: 12–17, and in Anne van Grevenstein, et al. "Aspects of the restoration and technical examination of the Haarlem civic guard group portraits by Frans Hals," ICOM Committee for Conservation, 9th Triennial Meeting, Dresden,



26–31 August 1990: 90–94.

2. Entry based on an examination report prepared by Yvonne Szafran, head of paintings conservation, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2011.