



Portrait of a Woman in Profile

Gerrit Dou
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1635–40

oil on panel

13.3 x 11.3 cm

signed in dark paint along left midpoint of oval:

“GDou”

GD-110

Currently on view at: The National Museum of
China, Beijing



How To Cite

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This profile portrait of an attractive young woman with wisps of wavy brown hair curling over her forehead is one in a series of small, bust-length studies that Gerrit Dou painted in an oval format between 1635 and 1640.^[1] Comparable paintings by the artist include his *Portrait Bust of a Youth* from ca. 1635 in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (fig 1), and *Portrait of a Young Woman* from ca. 1635–40 in the Manchester City Art Galleries.^[2] All three works are similar in scale and format, and situate a delicately rendered sitter against a loosely brushed background. This unknown female sitter is portrayed in a fur-trimmed jacket of the type worn by ladies in the middle class, and is shown without a formal ruff or other collar. She wears a simple embroidered silk undercap, called blackwork, with a scrolling foliage pattern typical of the 1630s, but not the intricate lace coif of the type that would have normally been worn over it.^[3] This manner of dress indicates a degree of informality and suggests that she may have been a relative or close personal acquaintance of the artist.^[4] Given her orientation facing left, it is possible that Dou originally paired her with a now-lost male pendant.

The woman's unusual "earring" further situates her fashion to the 1630s. This type of ornament is not attached to her ear, but is part of her headdress. It actually hangs from the tips of her ear-iron (*oorijzer*), which holds her undercap in place. Marieke de Winkel has found mention of similar such ornaments, consisting of crescent moons and a small pendant pearl or crystal, in inventories of women who were deceased in the 1640s but married in the 1630s, when they likely purchased these fashionable items.^[5]

In Dou's portrait, a bright light illuminates the sitter's glowing complexion, rosy lips and high-collared white shirt. The artist's close observation of light is evident in the way the shirt casts a bluish-white reflection on the underside of the woman's chin. Dou's painterly virtuosity is particularly apparent in the smooth and delicate rendering of the sitter's facial features, where his individualized brushstrokes are virtually imperceptible. Dou had an extraordinary capacity to balance areas of minute detail with more broadly painted passages. Here, for example, he allowed the ochre ground to provide a base color for the sitter's hair by painting the hair follicles with overlapping strokes of transparent paint. The range of his brushwork is evident in the freely rendered curly wisps of hair that fall along her temples, where some single follicles are also incised in the same

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerrit Dou, *Portrait Bust of a Youth*, ca. 1635, oil on panel, 15.1 x 12.2 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, nr. 35, © 2000–2012, The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, UK.

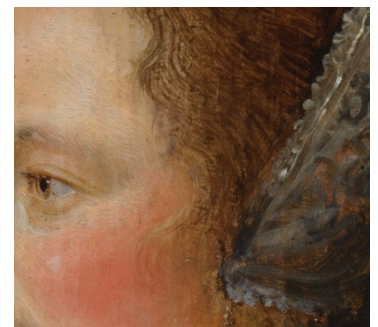


Fig 2. Detail of face, *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*, GD-110

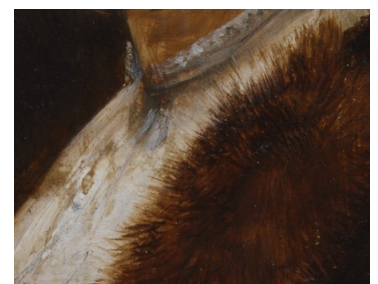


Fig 3. Detail of collar, *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*, GD-110

color of her flesh tone (**fig 2**). These wavy strokes contrast with the carefully brushed parallel hatchings that model both her temple and her eyebrow in virtually indistinguishable tones of color. Dou painted the semi-translucent bonnet with loosely brushed strokes that vary in rhythm and thickness, carefully allowing the faintly perceptible shape of the lady's ear to read through the embroidered undercap's delicate form. Finally, painting wet-into-wet, Dou softened the edges of the fur cloak by dragging his brush back and forth over the whites of the woman's shirt (**fig 3**).

Despite Dou's careful manner of painting to model his forms and create a range of textures, he often adjusted his compositions during the pictorial process. In this instance, he shifted the sitter's profile slightly to the right, a change that is apparent with the naked eye and also through infrared reflectography. This change is particularly evident along the sitter's forehead, suggesting that she may initially have directed her gaze slightly lower than in the final orientation.

An intriguing feature of this small portrait is the construction of its panel support, where the painted oval panel is set into a larger rectangular one. The reasons for this construction are unclear, but other examples of such inserted panels are known by Dou and other Leiden painters.^[6] In the case of the present *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*, the dendrochronology of the outer rectangular panel dates from the 1660s–70s, which suggests that it was later adapted to a larger format.^[7]

Three unidentified red wax seals on the reverse reference the painting's unknown eighteenth- and nineteenth-century owners (**fig 4**). The provenance is documented only as far back as 1914, when the work formed part of the renowned Marcus Kappel collection in Berlin (**fig 5**). Acquired by descent during the third decade of the twentieth century, the pocket-sized Dou painting made its way to England with Henry T. Rathenau, who escaped Berlin during World War II. The little Dou was kept in a bank vault in England up until 1997, when Rathenau's last heir, his sister Ellen Ettlinger, passed away.^[8]



Fig 4. Verso of *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*, GD-110



Fig 5. Interior of Marcus Kappel Gallery, Berlin, ca. 1921, where GD-110 is seen at the far right, lower row (photo: Sotheby's, New York, 4 June 2009, 38).

Endnotes

1. According to Ronni Baer, the handling of the paint and the delicately drawn features point to a date closer to 1640. See Ronni Baer, "Portrait of a Woman," in *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, Mauritshuis) (Washington D.C., 2000) 82–83, no. 10.
2. The Dou in the Manchester City Art Gallery is illustrated in 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, Mauritshuis) (Washington D.C., 2000), 80–81, no. 9.
3. Marieke de Winkel, letter to the author, July 2013, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection.
4. Marieke de Winkel, letter to the author, July 2013, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection.
5. The author would like to thank Marieke de Winkel (letter to the author, July 2013, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection) for identifying the "earrings" as part of the ear-iron and for providing the following references to inventories from the 1630s and 1640s that describe these jewels: Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archive, notary J. Westfrisius, no. 563B, fols. 1–21, 1/5 jan. 1636, inventory of Abraham de Marez (II) and Rebecca Hooghcamer, there at fol. 20r: "2 dito [peerlen] in halve maenties hangende f. 30:-:-"; Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archive, notary A. Eggericx, no. 1811B, pp. 963–94, dd. 20 jul. 1642, inventory of Jacques van Hoorn and Sofia van den Brande, there at p. 983: "2 halve maenen met cristallen"; Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archive, notary F. Bruyningh, no. 1414, fols. 41–48, dd. 23 nov. 1643, inventory of Mr. Paulus Jansz Iepelaar and Magdalena Jans, there at fol. 48r: "Een silver ysertien met 2 halve maentiens op f. 5:-:-". The author also thanks Piet Bakker for providing the precise folio numbers.
6. See Quentin Buvelot and Otto Naumann, "Format Changes in Paintings by Frans van Mieris the Elder," *Burlington Magazine* (February 2008): 102–4. In 2012 Gero Seelig, curator of Netherlandish paintings at the Staatliche Museum in Schwerin, presented his ongoing research on this phenomenon at Codart Vijftien in Brussels and shared a list of inlaid panels including works by an overwhelming number of Leiden painters such as Dou, Frans and Willem van Mieris, Godfried Schalcken, and Pieter van Slingeland, among others. For a partial list of these unusual constructions in Dou's oeuvre, see Ronni Baer, "Of Cats and Dogs: Domestic Pets in Rembrandt and Dou," in *Een Kroniek voor Jeroen Giltaij: Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* (2012): 66–67 n. 16; Anja K. Ševčík and Jiří Třeštík. "Doorstep Transactions: Structural and Compositional Transformations on Gerard Dou's *Young Lady on a Balcony*," *Bulletin of the National Gallery in Prague* 22–23 (2012–13): 23–43.
7. Ian Tyers, "Tree-Ring Analysis of *Portrait of a Lady in Profile, GD-110*," unpublished

dendrochronological report, November 2010, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection. Since the oval panel is firmly set into the larger panel, dendrochronological examination of the earlier oval panel is not possible through traditional means at this time.

8. On the painting's twentieth-century provenance, see Dominique Surh, "Portrait of a Woman in Profile," in *Salomon Lilian Old Masters* (Sales cat. Amsterdam) (Zwolle, 2003), 26–27, no. 8.

Provenance

- Marcus Kappel, Berlin, 1914; by descent to Henry T. Rathenau, Berlin; by descent to his sister Ellen Ettlinger, Oxford, England, until 1997 [Noortman Gallery, Maastricht].
- Private collection, the Netherlands [Salomon Lilian, Amsterdam, 2003].
- From whom acquired by the present owner, July 2003.

Exhibition History

- Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, on loan with the permanent collection, before 1940 (inv. no. 1173, label on verso).
- Washington, National Gallery of Art, "Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt," 16 April–6 August 2000; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 6 September–19 November 2000; The Hague, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, 9 December 2000–25 February 2001, no. 10 [lent by a private collector].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, December 2009–January 2011 [lent by the present owner].
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Dutch Treat," 11 October 2011–6 January 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal, "Gerrit Dou: The Leiden Collection from New York," 9 March–31 August 2014 [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].

References

- Baer, Ronni. "Portrait of a Woman." In *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis, 2000–1. Zwolle, 2000, 82–83, no. 10.
- Surh, Dominique. "Portrait of a Woman in Profile." In *Salomon Lilian Old Masters*. Sales cat. Amsterdam, 2003, 26–27, no. 8.
- Surh, Dominique, Van Tuinen, Ilona and Twilley, John. "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in the Leiden Collection." *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 1, 3, 5, 20–22, figs. 4a–b, 57, 58, 61.

Technical Summary

The painting is executed on a vertically grained, oval oak panel, which has been set into a larger rectangular oak panel with a vertical grain. The rectangular panel is considerably thicker than the oval. The oval panel could not be dated because the edges are obscured, but the rectangular panel has an earliest felling date of 1661.^[1] It is unclear when the oval was set into the rectangular panel, but it was likely during the artist's lifetime.^[2] The rectangular panel has equal, steep bevels on all four edges, and the composite panel has a slight convex warp when viewed from the front.

The rectangular panel is unprimed and unpainted, but the oval panel was prepared with a light-colored ground that was thinly and evenly applied. The priming is radio-opaque and accentuates the woodgrain of the oval panel in the X-radiograph. The ground does not extend all the way to the edges of the oval, but the paint does. The paint has been built up in successive thin layers, painted wet-into-wet. The paint is so thin in the background that the ground shows through, but there is slight impasto in the figure, most notably along the outer contours of her cap, her proper left sleeve, and the fur trim of her cloak. Raised brushwork in the background indicates a horizontally oriented arch to the right of the sitter's head, which does not relate to the current composition. Infrared photographs and a pentimento reveal that the sitter's profile was shifted slightly to the right.^[3]

The painting is in good condition. There are slight protrusions and related craters throughout the paint and some craquelure is visible. There are some marks around the lower right side of the oval, which may be rabbit damage from an old frame. This would indicate that the oval panel was set into the rectangular panel well after the painting was completed.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Ian Tyers, dendrochronological report, November 2012.



2. Ian Tyers, dendrochronological report, November 2012.
3. Infrared photographs were taken at 780, 850, and 1000 nm.