



Portrait of a Man Reading a Book

Pieter Cornelisz van Slingelandt
(Leiden 1640 – 1691 Leiden)

1668

oil on copper

16.2 x 12.6 cm

signed and dated in dark paint along page
edges of book: "PSlingelandt / 1668"

PvS-100



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This small portrait on copper depicts a seated man wearing a slate-blue robe who looks alertly at the viewer. He is about to turn the page in the book that he holds in his left hand. The book and the long nails of his elegant right hand establish him as a man of learning and leisure, but Pieter van Slingelandt's painting is devoid of attributes that might identify him or indicate his vocation. The table supporting his right elbow is covered with a red oriental carpet providing a colorful anchor for the composition.^[1] Van Slingelandt has used a uniform light to isolate the unknown sitter against a background so dark, one can scarcely discern the edge of the man's black skull cap. Wispy brown curls further frame the man's face, in which quizzical eyes compete for attention with the prominent nose.

The man's robe was known in the Dutch Republic as a *Japone rok* (Japanese robe). These loose-fitting and padded robes were modeled on the precious silk kimonos (*Keyserrocken*, imperial gowns, or *schenckagierocken*, gift gowns) that the Tokugawa Shogun gave to high-ranking officials of the Dutch East India Company during their annual visits to Edo, Japan. The *Japone rok* was worn indoors by men and women alike to ward off the cold.^[2] This slate-blue robe with its turned-over collar is very similar to the one worn by the standing man in another portrait by Van Slingelandt (**fig 1**), even if the latter robe seems much silkier and bulkier. It is unclear whether the brown trim of the collar is a strip of fur or the edge of a woolen padding that has been turned over.

One of Gerrit Dou's (1613–75) most talented students, Pieter van Slingelandt was so adept at emulating his master's meticulous techniques and compositional elements that his best work has often been attributed to Dou.^[3] The smooth modeling of the sitter's face and hands echoes the latter's finest brushwork, but this figure does not match the energetic physicality of Dou's portraits. The diminutive size of Van Slingelandt's half-length, seated portrait would have been rather unusual in the first half of the seventeenth century, when life-size portraits were the norm, but fits fully within the trend toward the smaller likenesses painted after the middle of the century by masters such as Gerard ter Borch (1617–81) and Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84).^[4] Gerrit Dou also produced several small portraits, including the delicate oval *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1655 (National Gallery, London) (**fig 2**), and *Portrait of Dirck van Beresteyn* in the Leiden Collection (GD-111). Dou's student Frans van Mieris the Elder

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Pieter Cornelisz van Slingelandt, *Portrait of a Gentleman in a Japone Rok*, oil on panel, 31.4 x 24.3 cm, Private Collection, photo © Christie's Images; out of copyright



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1655, oil on panel, 14.5 x 11.7 cm, National Gallery, London, Wynn Ellis Bequest, 1876, inv. NG968, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY



(1635–81) also painted meticulous works in small format, a number of which are in the Leiden Collection, as, for example, *Portrait of a Fifty-Two-Year-Old Man* (FM-104).^[5] The keen interest that Leiden patrons had in commissioning their likenesses from masters such as Dou, Van Mieris, and Van Slingelandt is evident in the large number of their portraits in the Leiden Collection. The refined technique of these *fijnschilders* made them eminently equipped to do their sitters justice on small panel or copper supports.

Small, precious portraits like this one by Van Slingelandt were time-consuming. *Portrait of a Man Reading a Book* dates from the phase in the artist's career when he was known to spend prodigious amounts of time finishing his works, resulting, in this instance, in a finely rendered, charming portrait that retains an engaging, lifelike character.^[6]

-Henriette Rahusen

Endnotes

1. Van Slingelandt used the same carpet to similarly anchor his drawn *Portrait of Jan Poelaert*, 1674. According to RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) database, this portrait was with the art dealer Mireille Mosler in New York in 2014.
2. Charlotte van Rappard-Boon and N. Dekking, *Imitation and Inspiration: Japanese Influence on Dutch Art from 1650 to the Present*, ed. N. Dekking (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; Tokyo, Suntory Museum of Art) (Amsterdam, 1991), 91–93, 96.
3. Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse Fijnschilders van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Zwolle, 1989), 218–28.
4. Rudolf E. O. Ekkart and Quentin Buvelot, *Dutch Portraits: The Age of Rembrandt and Frans Hals*, trans. Beverly Jackson (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (London, 2007), 59. At 43 x 34 cm, Ter Borch's pendant portraits of Jan van Romondt and his wife, Maria Ziewertsdr. van Out (private collection), are beautiful examples of the painterly finesse that smaller-than-life portraits required, as is his even smaller portrait (20 x 16 cm) of his colleague Jan van Goyen (1596–1656) (Fürstliche Sammlungen Liechtenstein, Vaduz).
5. See also Van Mieris's *Self-Portrait*, 1661, and the likeness of his wife, Cunera van der Cock, 1662, two ovals that measure a mere 11 x 8 cm each (private collection, New York). These two works are reproduced in Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Nieuwenhuizen, *Leidse Fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 132–33, nos. 124 and 125.
6. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3:162.

Provenance

- (Possibly sale, Jean Baptiste Pierre Lebrun, Paris, May 1803, no. 30).^[1]
- Private collection, France or Belgium, possibly Dr. Richter.
- Confiscated by Nazi forces in France in 1940; selected by Adolph Hitler for the Führermuseum on 21 July 1940; transferred by Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler on behalf of Adolph Hitler to Hans Posse by 29 July 1940; recorded in the possession of the Special Commission Linz (Sonderauftrag Linz) in Dresden, Linz no. 2132; collected by the Allies and

recorded at the Munich Central Collecting Point, 15 October 1945, Mu. no. 9514.2^[2]

- Prime Minister of Austria, Salzburg, 18 January 1952, on the condition that the painting would be restituted to its prior owner; transferred to the Museum of Fine Arts, Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum); held at the Mauerbach Depot until 1980, Mauerbach no. 408 (announced in the *Amtsblatt zur Wiener Zeitung* on 2 September 1969, no. 428).
- Austrian Federal Monuments Office (Bundesdenkmalamt), ca. 1980–92 (announced in the *Amtsblatt zur Wiener Zeitung* on 1 February 1986, no. 408).
- Restituted to the descendants of the prior owner in 1992.
- (Sale, Sotheby's, London, 8 July 2004, no. 268 [Johnny Van Haeften Ltd., London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Provenance Notes

1. The Lebrun sale of 1803 lists the following entry, which corresponds closely with the present painting in both size and description: “Lot 30. Pierre Van Slingelandt. Un Homme vu à mi-corps la tête de face, tenant un livre & appuyé sur le coin d’une table; il est vêtu d’une robe-de chambre & a la tête couverte d’une calotte. Tableau fin & d’une couleur brillante. Peinture sur cuivre, Haut. 5 p. 9 lig., larg. 4 p. 6 lig.” (Lot 30. Pierre Van Slingelandt. Man seen from the waist up, facing frontally, holding a book and leaning on the corner of a table; he is wearing a dressing gown and his head is covered with a skullcap. A highly finished and brilliantly colored painting. Painted on copper, 5.9 pounces high, 4.6 pounces wide).

2. Recorded by Hitler’s personal secretary, Heinrich Himmler showed Hitler this specific painting on 21 July 1940. Hitler approved of the painting and sent it, along with others, to Hans Posse. Posse was the director of the Dresden Gemäldegalerie and Hitler had placed him in charge of looted artworks, to form the foundation of his planned Führermuseum. When Posse wrote back to Hitler on 29 July 1940, he stated that this painting would be a good addition to the miniatures section of the Führermuseum and described it as “eine recht hutsche Arbeit” (a rather pretty work). See Birgit Schwarz, *Hitlers Museum*, in References.

References

- Schwarz, Birgit. *Hitlers Museum: Die Fotoalben Gemäldegalerie Linz; Dokumente zum “Führermuseum.”* Vienna, 2004, 107, 225, no. 3/19.

Technical Summary

The support, a rectangular copper sheet, has been inset flush into the routed surface of a four-membered wooden stretcher slightly larger than the copper in both directions. The copper edges are not visible and the panel thickness cannot be measured directly.

The reverse of the copper panel has been firmly adhered to the wood stretcher members, so only the middle rectangle of copper remains visible along the reverse.^[1] The panel is in plane and has a smooth surface along the front, however the oxidized reverse has slight pitting and variations in texture, which suggests the copper may have been hammered prior to being rolled. There are two inscriptions along the exposed reverse, but no wax seals, stencils, chalk, labels or makers marks are located along the panel reverse.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint thinly and extremely smoothly applied with no use of impasto, although areas of low brushmarking outline the outer contours of the compositional forms.

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint along the page edges of the book the figure holds, oriented towards the viewer.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional changes revealed in the images and as a pentimento appear along the back cover of the open book: the length of the spine appears to have been extended by about one third beyond the figure's proper left hand toward the right panel edge, and the position of the figure's hand (i.e., thumb) may have been shifted.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. 11.3 cm H x 7.6 cm W