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**Portrait of a Man in Profile (Previously
"Portrait of a Jew in Profile")**

Attributed to Govaert Flinck
(Kleve 1615 – 1660 Amsterdam)

ca. 1637
oil on panel
20 x 14.1 cm
RR-121

How to cite

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This small panel bears the bust of a young bearded man turned to the left, his profile emphatically set off by his shoulder-length curly hair. Only a sliver of the right eyebrow and an indication of the right eyelid are visible, suggesting a slight turn toward the viewer. The torso is ensconced in a brown garment, which blends into the color of the background, and so the viewer's eye comes to rest on the man's face, lit from the upper left. The expression of this smooth visage—the closed mouth and the half-closed eyes staring unfocused into the distance—suggests the serious and internalized gaze of the model.

The man's appearance—in particular the dark brown hair, short beard, and lightly curved eyebrows—points to the description of Jesus appearing in Samuel van Hoogstraten's treatise on painting, published in 1678:

His hair is of the color of the ripe hazelnut, parted on the top in the manner of the Nazarites, and falling straight down to the ears, but curling further below, with blond highlights and fanning off his shoulders. He has a fair forehead and no wrinkles or marks on his face, his cheeks are tinged with pink . . . his beard is large and full but not long, and parted in the middle. His glance shows simplicity adorned with maturity, his eyes are clear and commanding, never apt to laugh.^[1]

Van Hoogstraten (1627–78) drew his description from the so-called Lentulus Letter, which was then thought to provide a contemporary description of Jesus's physical appearance.^[2] Indeed, a group of twelve bust-length oil studies of the head of Jesus painted by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) and his pupils from the late 1640s to the mid-1650s seems to follow the description in this letter. As Lloyd DeWitt has demonstrated, these representations of what was thought to be an eyewitness description formed a radical break with the existing iconographic tradition.^[3] Instead of following the tradition of icon painting, Rembrandt and his pupils "brought to life" an image of Jesus by portraying him with his head slightly turned or inclined. In these works, the facial expression is "turned inward," and the figure is rendered in loose, painterly brushwork. That these artists based their images on living models is confirmed by contemporary sources. Rembrandt's own inventory of 1656 includes, alongside two *Christus tronie van Rembrandt* ("head of Christ by Rembrandt"), a *Christus tronie naar het leven* ("head of Christ from life") that must be connected to this group of head studies.^[4] The poet Jan Vos (1612–67), furthermore, indicates that Rembrandt and his pupils used Jewish models in their depictions of Jesus. In writing about a painting by Govaert Flinck (1615–60), the author explains with a sarcastic (and anti-Semitic) tone why Jesus is shown with a closed mouth: "because the model

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Hans Burgmaier, *Lentulus Letter with Jesus in Profile*, 1512, woodcut, 254 × 169 mm, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich, inv. 67874D



Fig 2. Govaert Flinck, *The Lamentation*, 1637, oil on canvas, 90.1 × 71.9 cm, signed, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, inv. P.2006-001



Fig 3. Govaert Flinck, *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, c. 1635, oil on canvas, 124 × 151 cm, signed, Museum het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland,

was a Jew.”^[5]

The Hague, inv. NK 2487

The present painting relates closely to this group of head studies, but it diverges from them in one critical aspect: it is the only one that represents the head of Jesus in profile. One of the few precedents for this pose is a woodcut of 1512 by Hans Burgmaier (**fig 1**), which accompanied the publication of the Lentulus Letter. Burgmaier's print depicts a profile image of Jesus in a circle, thereby alluding to portraits of rulers from antiquity and the Renaissance in which the profile pose emphasized the status and character of the sitter.^[6]

According to dendrochronological analysis, the panel for this head study could have been available for painting as early as 1625, which opens the possibility that this work was executed at an earlier date than were the heads of Jesus created in the Rembrandt workshop in the late 1640s.^[7] Indeed, the handling of the figure relates more closely to the works that Rembrandt and his students created in the 1630s than in the 1640s. The painting's execution most closely resembles Govaert Flinck's manner of painting figures when he was working in the workshop of Hendrick Uylenburgh (1584/89–ca. 1660) during the late 1630s. There, under the inspiration of Rembrandt's powerful effects of chiaroscuro, as well as that master's muted palette and heightened observation of emotion, Flinck gradually moved away from the aesthetic of his first teacher, Lambert Jacobsz (ca. 1598–1636). Flinck's *The Lamentation*, 1637, in Tokyo, demonstrates the smooth modeling and blunt chiaroscuro that marks the young artist's works from this transitional period of his career (**fig 2**).^[8] The pinkish flesh tones, white highlights, and heavy black eyes in the Leiden Collection painting are entirely consistent with the faces in *The Lamentation*.

As is evident in the Tokyo painting, as well as in his *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, datable to about 1635 (**fig 3**), Flinck had a penchant for painting heads in profile.^[9] With most of these profiles, Flinck used the telling device of a swath of dark hair that falls down the far side of the face, coming forward a bit artificially, and sets off the lighter contour. Flinck may have adapted this way of arranging hair from Rembrandt's early self-portraits, but he quickly abandoned this approach in his later works as he gained mastery of the human head and its lighting from a variety of angles. Perhaps Flinck had another Passion scene in mind when he made this relatively direct study, which is both powerfully observed from life and rendered in a compelling fashion.^[10]

Endnotes

1. "Zijn hair is van rijpe hazelnoten verwe, boven, na gewoonte der Nazareen, gescheyden, en tot de ooren toe effen, maer voort nederwaerts rond krullende, geelachtich blinkende, en van zijne schouderen afwaejende; hy is schoon van voorhoofd, zonder rimpel of vlekke in 't aengezicht; zijn wangen zijn versiert met Roozeverwe, hebbende niets aen zijn lichaam dat te berispen is; zijn baert is groot en overvloedich van hair, niet lang, maer in 't midden verdeelt; het opslach zijner oogen vertoont wel een simpelheyt, maer versiert met rypicheyt; zijn oogen zijn klaer en ontsachlijk, noyt bereyt tot lichen." Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: Anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Rotterdam, 1678), 105. For the English translation, see Gary Schwartz, *The Rembrandt Book* (New York, 2006), 303.
2. Erik Inglis, *Faces of Power and Piety* (Los Angeles, 2008), 23; and Lloyd DeWitt, "Testing Tradition Against Nature: Rembrandt's Radical New Image of Jesus," in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 121–22. The letter, which was purportedly sent by a certain Publius Lentulus to the Roman senate during Christ's lifetime, described his physical appearance. The text of the letter was transmitted in various publications over the years, and was well known in the seventeenth-century (see fig. 1).
3. Lloyd DeWitt, "Testing Tradition Against Nature: Rembrandt's Radical New Image of Jesus," in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 109–45.
4. Franziska Gottwald, "The Heads of Christ in the Context of the Tronie," in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts), 154–55. For the definition of the painting category *tronie*, see *ibid.*, 147–51.
5. "Dit beeldt is naar een Joodt gemaakt." Jan Vos, "Christus, voor Joris de Wyze, door Govert Flinck, naar een Joodt, geschildert," in *Alle de Gedichten van den Poëet Jan Vos*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1662), 512. See also Gary Schwartz, *The Rembrandt Book* (New York, 2006), 303.
6. See Lloyd DeWitt, "Testing Tradition Against Nature: Rembrandt's Radical New Image of Jesus," in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 122.
7. Peter Klein, letter of 22 February 2008. See also the Technical Summary.
8. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 2: 1019, no. 612, 1044 (ill.).

9. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 2:1019, no. 613, 1045 (ill.). He appears to have inherited this penchant from his first teacher.
10. It is probably not the painting criticized by Jan Vos in his poem, however, as he describes the face of Jesus as "shining": "Het hart is anders dan het aanzicht dat hier straalt" (The heart is different than the face that shines here). Jan Vos, "Christus, voor Joris de Wyze, door Govert Flinck, naar een Joodt, geschildert," in *Alle de Gedichten van den Poëet Jan Vos...* (Amsterdam, 1662), 512.

Provenance

- [Bijl-Van Urk B. V., Alkmaar, by 2006, as by School of Rembrandt].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- Paris, Musée du Louvre, "Rembrandt et la figure du Christ / Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus," 21 April–18 July 2011; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 3 August–30 October 2011; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts, 20 November 2011–12 February 2012, no. 42, as by School of Rembrandt [lent by the present owner].

References

- DeWitt, Lloyd. "La tradition à l'épreuve de la nature: Rembrandt et son image radicalement neuve du Christ." In *Rembrandt et la figure du Christ*. Edited by Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes, 133–34, no. 4.15, 244, no. 42, as by School of Rembrandt. Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts. Calenzano, 2011.
- DeWitt, Lloyd. "Testing Tradition Against Nature: Rembrandt's Radical New Image of Jesus." In *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*. Edited by Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes. 130, 133, no. 4.15, 242, no. 42, as by School of Rembrandt. Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts. Philadelphia, 2011.

Technical Summary



The support, a single plank of thin, vertically grained, rectangular oak, has a tree-ring sequence that was not found to match eastern Baltic, western European, or other dated or undated reference data.^[1] The unthinned and uncradled panel has bevels along all four sides. The panel reverse has a label but no wax seals, import stamps, inscriptions or panel maker's mark.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by a brown imprimatura. The ground remains visible through the brown glazes along the shoulder of the figure's jacket. The paint has been applied with visible brushwork throughout, including along the background; however, it is most pronounced through the figure's face, hair and jacket. More opaque paint applied along the background extends up to the curls. The contour line that defines the nostril along the underside of the nose and the one between the two lips form two pronounced raised horizontal lines.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

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

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The identification of the wood is based on Ian Tyers's 2010 dendrochronology report. Dendrochronology undertaken by Peter Klein in 2006 found "an earliest felling date can be derived for the year 1617, more plausible is a felling date between 1621..1623....1627 + x. With a minimum of 2 years for seasoning an earliest creation of the painting is possible from 1619 upwards. Under the assumption of a median of 15 sapwood rings and 2 years for seasoning a creation is plausible from 1625 upwards."