



Old Man with a White Beard

Attributed to Salomon Koninck

ca. 1650

oil on panel

25.7 x 20.5 cm

RR-120



How to cite

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This small panel of an old man with a white beard is a *tronie*, a genre of painting that emerged in the first half of the seventeenth century in the Northern Netherlands.^[1] Though based on living models, these bust-length figure paintings are not portraits but rather character studies.^[2] The models, whether old or young, often sport fanciful costumes and show lively facial expressions. *Tronies* were generally painted in a loose or sketchy manner, a handling that was contrary to the decorum generally expected from formal portraiture, but one that allowed artists to demonstrate the expressiveness of their brushwork.^[3] As such they were valued as demonstrations of painterly prowess, not only in the handling of materials and textures, but also in the rendering of the human face and its passions.^[4]

The characteristics of the *tronie* are exhibited in exemplary fashion in this painting of a bearded old man turned slightly to the right. Light from the left strikes his face, creased by countless wrinkles, in such a way as to isolate the right eye, cheek, and part of the white beard against the surrounding darkness. The old man's dress, consisting of a simple brown garment and a soft hat, identifies him as a person of low social position.^[5] The model stares off to the right with raised eyebrows and slightly opened mouth, appearing to react in surprise to something not seen by the viewer.^[6]

The attribution of the Leiden Collection painting has been a matter of some dispute since it first appeared on the market in the early twentieth century. Hofstede de Groot, and later Valentiner, attributed it to Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69).^[7] Von Wurzbach connected it to Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74),^[8] while Bauch thought that the artist could have been Adriaen van Ostade (1610–85).^[9] The closest comparisons to this work, however, are found in the paintings of Salomon Koninck (1609–56). Three of Koninck's paintings feature a similar model with flowing white hair and beard, a strong nose with a pointed tip, and distinctively small eyes with puffy rounded eyelids.^[10] In each of these paintings the man is shown standing at a balustrade holding his gloves in his hand. The panel in The Hague (**fig 1**) is dated 1650, which is probably when all three of these works were painted.^[11] Although such *tronies* were valued as independent works of art for eventual sale on the open market, they were also used as preparation for finished paintings. Indeed, Koninck depicted the same model in a number of other guises, ranging from a scholar in his study to one of the elders in *Susanna and the Elders*.^[12]

An attribution of the Leiden Collection painting to Koninck can only be

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Salomon Koninck, *A Bearded Old Man in a Beret, at a Balustrade, Holding His Gloves*, 1650, oil on panel, 57 × 46.5 cm, Stichting Nederlands Kunstbezit, 1973, Instituut Collectie Nederland, The Hague, inv. NK 2694

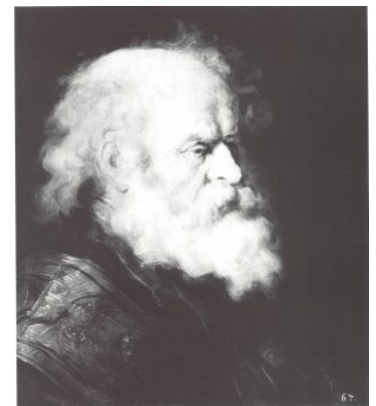


Fig 2. Salomon Koninck, *The Old Bishop*, ca. 1648, oil on panel, 59.5 × 52.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, inv. 963



tentatively proposed because the figure is more freely rendered than are those in his finished paintings or on other *tronies* attributed to him, although its sketchy appearance may indicate that the artist has here painted directly from the model.^[13] Nevertheless, this figure study does display the calm and methodical buildup and palette of muted colors that are characteristic of Koninck's painting technique. The smooth, regular curves of the folds in the man's costume resemble those seen in Koninck's works, most specifically a loose head study by the artist now in Dresden (**fig 2**).^[14]

- David de Witt and Franziska Gottwald, 2017

Endnotes

1. Dagmar Hirschfelder, *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2008); Franziska Gottwald, *Das Tronie: Muster, Studie, Meisterwerk; Die Genese einer Gattung der Malerei vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zu Rembrandt* (Berlin and Munich, 2011).
2. In some cases the sitter would have been recognizable to contemporaries; for *tronies* based on Rembrandt's appearance, for example, this aspect would have been part of the value of the painting, without representing the person individually in the sense of a portrait. See Ernst van de Wetering, "The Multiple Functions of Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," in *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (London, 1999), 35–36.
3. Ernst van de Wetering, "The Multiple Functions of Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," in *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (London, 1999), 9–11.
4. Ernst van de Wetering, "The Multiple Functions of Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," in *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (London, 1999), 36–37.
5. See Dagmar Hirschfelder, *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2008), 66, fig. 31, for a comparable *tronie* of a peasant figure by Abraham Bloemaert, which he painted in the 1630s.
6. The old man's expression of surprise is reminiscent of Rembrandt's etching *Self-Portrait with a Cap, Open-Mouthed*, 1630, 5.1 x 4.4 cm, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, CA. M.1977.32.010.G (Bartsch 320).
7. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, "Nieuw ontdekte Rembrandts, II," *Overdrukt uit Onze Kunst* (December 1912): 6; Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt: Wiedergefundene Gemälde (1910–1920) in 120 Abbildungen* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921), xx, 50, 131, no. 54.
8. Alfred von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler Lexikon*, 3 vols. (Vienna and Leipzig, 1906), 2:408.
9. Kurt Bauch, *Der frühe Rembrandt und seine Zeit: Studien zur geschichtlichen Bedeutung seines Frühstils* (Berlin, 1960), 233.
10. Significantly, this model does not appear in the work of any other artists.
11. For *A Bearded Old Man in a Beret, at a Balustrade, Holding His Gloves*, 1650, see Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 3: 1649, no. 1128. The other two examples are Salomon Koninck, *Bearded Old Man in a Beret, Holding His Gloves, at a Window*, ca. 1650, oil on panel, 97 x 77 cm, Koninklijke Musea voor

Schone Kunsten van België, Museum van Oude Kunst, Brussels, inv. 3733; and *Bearded Old Man in a Beret, Pointing to a Medal*, ca. 1650, oil on panel, 54.5 × 46.9 cm, private collection, Mainz. These are illustrated in Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler* (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 3: 1649, 1703–4, nos. 1127–30 (ill.).

12. Salomon Koninck, *A Scholar in Contemplation at His Desk*, ca. 1648/50, oil on canvas, 69 × 58.5 cm, sale, Christie's, London, 12 March 1976, lot 11 (ill.); see Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 3: 1646, no. 1113; and *Susanna and the Elders*, 1649, oil on panel, 45 × 8.2 cm, Amsterdam, with Salomon Lilian Fine Art in 2004; see Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler* (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94) 3: 1644, no. 1095, 1669 (ill.).
13. See, for example, the finished character of *Bust of an Old Man in a Beret*, ca. 1650, 61 × 47 cm, sale, Christie's, New York, 30 January 2013, lot 207.
14. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 3: 1647, no. 1117.

Provenance

- Charles Auguste Louis Joseph de Morny, Duke of Morny (1811–65).
- Viardot, probably Louis Viardot (1800–83), Paris.
- Édouard Warneck, Paris, by 1915 (his sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 27 May 1926, no. 69, as by Rembrandt).
- Arthur Sambon (1867–1947), Paris, as of 1929.
- (Sale, Palais Galliera, Paris, 24 June 1968, as by “Rembrandt (?)”).
- (Sale, Christie's, London, 27 May 1977, no. 114, as circle of Rembrandt for £8,500).
- [Johnny van Haefte, Ltd., London, by 2006, as circle of Rembrandt].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- Paris, Jeu de Paume, Tuileries Gardens, “Rétrospective des grands et des petits maîtres hollandais de XVIIe siècle,” 28 April–10 July 1911, no. 118, as by Rembrandt [lent by Édouard Warneck, Paris].

References

- Dayot, Armand. *Exposition rétrospective des grands et des petits maîtres hollandais du XVIIe siècle*. Exh. cat. Paris, Jeu de Paume, Tuileries Gardens. Paris, 1911, 22, no. 118 (as by Rembrandt).
- Dayot, Armand. *Grands et petits maîtres hollandais*. Paris, 1912, 146, no. 130, [n.p.] (as by Rembrandt).
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. "Nieuw ontdekte Rembrandts, II." *Overdrukt uit Onze Kunst* (December 1912): 6 (as by Rembrandt).
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*. Edited and translated by Edward G. Hawke, 6: 227, no. 432, as by Rembrandt. 8 vols. London, 1907–28. Originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28.
- Valentiner, Wilhelm R. *Rembrandt: Wiedergefundene Gemälde (1910–1920) in 120 Abbildungen*. Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921, xx, 50, 131, no. 54 (as by Rembrandt).
- Bauch, Kurt. *Der frühe Rembrandt und seine Zeit Studien zur geschichtlichen Bedeutung seines Frühstils*. Berlin, 1960, 233, no. 197 (as an uncertain attribution, possibly by Adriaen van Ostade).

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of fairly thin, vertically grained, rectangular Eastern Baltic oak, has fell and use dates between 1634 and 1650.^[1] The unthinned and uncradled panel has bevels along the lower and right edges only. A vertical split and damage along the upper right corner have been reinforced along the reverse with a fine weave fabric patch, which wraps around onto the thickness of the upper panel edge.^[2] The panel reverse has labels, one import stamp, and inscriptions but no wax seals or panel maker's mark.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint applied with thin transparent glazes that defines the drapery folds and allows the underlayer to show through. The background has been painted with low horizontal brushwork, and the old man's hat and his facial features have been executed with areas of slightly raised brushwork and low impasto.

During a 2006 restoration, the old man's dark hat proved to be sensitive during cleaning. Two pigment samples were analyzed using Raman spectroscopy: "Sample (1) taken from the man's nose along the side of his proper right eye was found to be composed of vermilion and yellow iron oxide, most likely in the form of an ocher, and some white lead particles. Sample (2) taken close



to the man's proper right eyebrow was found to be composed mainly of a yellow iron oxide, similar to that observed in sample (1), in addition to some vermilion and lead particles. All the pigments identified are known to have been used since antiquity."^[3] In addition, infrared spectra run on two samples found that "both samples were complex showing a mixture of organic and inorganic materials. Protein and oil or natural resin was evident in one sample, along with calcite and other unidentified materials. The other sample showed features consistent with a metal soap."^[4] Martin Bijl felt quite certain the panel was from the seventeenth century. In conclusion, the solubility of the old man's dark hat may have arisen from impurities and additives to the oil medium.^[5]

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

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2006 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Ian Tyers's 2010 dendrochronology report.
2. Split: 4.5 cm in from the upper right corner, 3.8 cm in from the lower right corner. Damage: 1 cm wide by 2 cm long. Patch: 7.5 cm long by 4.5 cm wide.
3. See "RR-120_Centeno_Analysis.pdf" on file at the Leiden Collection.
4. See "RR-120_JMartin_Analysis.jpeg" on file at the Leiden Collection.
5. See "RR-120_NKrieg_examination_report.jpg" on file at the Leiden Collection.