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Bearded Man in a Fur Hat (Previously "Jew in a Fur Hat")

School of Rembrandt van Rijn

ca. 1656
oil on panel
22.2 x 17.8 cm
RR-118

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A man with a long thin face accentuated by prominent cheekbones and a strong nose confronts the viewer with an intense, yet slightly averted, gaze. His parted lips and furrowed brow suggest that he is deep in thought. Lending drama to his appearance is the way raking light illuminates the left side of his face, while catching a few sharp features on its shaded right. The expressive force of this head suggests that the painting is not a portrait, but a character study, commonly referred to in Dutch art as a *tronie*.[1]

The restrained painterly effect and the contained emotion of the figure place this work among those painted by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) and his followers in Amsterdam in the 1640s. Evidence for this context is provided by an etching dated 1646 **(fig 1)** made by Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), one of Rembrandt's students, after the original composition, or a version of it.[2] Equally significantly, this head study is known in at least four extant versions, including ones in the Gemäldegalerie, Kassel;[3] the Musée du Louvre, Paris;[4] and a private collection in Toronto.[5] This cluster of works conforms to a pattern found in Rembrandt's workshop where similar versions of a composition are known to exist, likely the result of pedagogical exercises assigned by the master **(fig 2)**.

The bold, open brushstrokes of the present head study relate to those in Rembrandt's more sketch-like works of the second half of the 1640s, even though the Leiden Collection panel lacks Rembrandt's decisive touch in evoking mass and structure. For example, the sweeping dry strokes of dead color in the costume and the thicker strokes articulating bone structure around the man's eye are similar to those in the master's *Portrait Study of a Young Jew* of around 1648 in Berlin **(fig 3)**.[6] Despite the presence of Van Hoogstraten's etched image of this sitter, the loose brushwork of this head study differs from the smooth surfaces and soft textures of his paintings during the 1640s. It should be noted, however, that the man's almond-shaped eyes are similar to those in Van Hoogstraten's works, as in, for example, his 1647 *Adoration of the Shepherds*.[7]

The other extant versions of this composition demonstrate a range of handling and finish, suggesting that they were executed by different hands, although none can be identified. Closest to the present painting is the one in Toronto, but its forms and surfaces are more even. The Kassel version likewise interprets the composition with much greater evenness and smoothness in the facial features, reflecting an inclination toward higher finish, which may indicate a response to later developments in artistic taste. The version in the Louvre, by contrast, shows thick and opaque impasto and simplified forms that may even suggest eighteenth-century origins.[8]

The bold effect of open brushwork in the Leiden Collection panel speaks strongly

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Bust of a Man with a Beard and a Fur Hat (Portrait of Jan van Leyden)*, 1646, etching, only state, 139 × 111 mm, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-OB-12.791



Fig 2. After Rembrandt van Rijn, *Bust of a Man with a Fur Hat*, 1640s–1650s, oil on panel, 21.3 x 18 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, no. 248



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait*

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against the suggestion that this work was painted by Constantijn Daniel van Renesse (1626–80), whose handling of paint never progressed beyond the hesitant and finicky, and whose range of emotional expression was limited.[9] Only the somber mood resonates with this pupil’s known works. Furthermore, Van Renesse’s unconventional and limited study with Rembrandt took place later, between 1649 and 1652, and focused on multifigure historical compositions.[10] His few single-figure paintings are portraits of family and friends.[11] The closest candidate for authorship would be another of Rembrandt’s pupils from the early 1640s, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), who experimented with loose paint handling during this period. Nevertheless, his lively handling of forms and features does not accord with the heavy solidity conjured here by thick, straight strokes of paint. At present this work can only be ascribed to an anonymous pupil in Rembrandt’s workshop around 1645.

Study of a Young Jew, ca. 1648, oil on panel, 25.5 × 21.3 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. 828M, © Foto: Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Fotograf/in: Jörg P. Anders

For Rembrandt’s pupils the evocation of emotion in the model’s features would have been an important element to study and capture in paint. One may even suggest that this sitter projects a state of inner turmoil, a quality that seems to be suggested by the purported identification of the sitter in Van Hoogstraten’s print. An inscription at the upper left identifies the man as Jan van Leyden (1509?–36), the charismatic Dutch Anabaptist leader who preached radical rejection of worldly authority and briefly seized power in the German city of Münster in 1533 before he was defeated and executed. Van Hoogstraten also produced a companion print after a different painting of an unnamed man, who was later identified as the Quaker martyr James Nailor in a copy of the print.[12] Both of these identifications of a controversial historical figure were arbitrary interpretations; each was selected because the depiction fit a particular mental image of the man’s personality.

Although Van Hoogstraten identified the model as a Dutchman, most commentators have seen him as Jewish. His tall fur hat appears to represent the Polish type known as the *kalpac*, and more specifically the *spodic*, associated with Polish Jews.[13] Equally Polish in flavor is his plain, loosely-fitted garment, which looks like a caftan. While it is always hazardous to base identity on features,[14] this man’s distinctive appearance indicates that he was one of the many Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to the Netherlands starting in the 1630s, and who would have stood out sharply on the streets of Amsterdam.[15] His untrimmed beard likewise would have conformed to Ashkenazi Jewish observance, and less to Dutch fashion.

This model, thus, apparently posed for one or more artists in Rembrandt’s studio, and possibly for the master himself, as part of the studio’s practice of studying live models both as exercises and in preparation for history paintings. In their desire for more authentic models for the figures in their Biblical scenes, these artists likely looked to the Jewish residents of Amsterdam rather than to their fellow natives of Northern

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Europe. In much the same way, they found in Polish, Persian and Turkish costumes indications of correct forms of attire in such scenes.

- David de Witt, 2017

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Endnotes

1. For a discussion of *tronies*, see *Old Man with a White Beard,* RR-120.
2. F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700* (Amsterdam, 1949–), 11, 139, no. 14. This print must have been a pair to one showing a different model in profile, dated 1646 in the first state: etching, 14 × 11 cm, known only in an impression in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, inv. RP-10168. See Gregor Weber in *Rembrandt-Bilder: Die historische Sammlung der Kasseler Gemäldegalerie*, ed. Michael J. Essenhauer (Exh. cat. Kassel, Staatliche Museen Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) (Kassel 2006), 187 (fig. 24.2).
3. *Bust of a Man with a Fur Cap*, oil on panel, 21.3 x 18 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Museen Kassel, inv. GK 248. Bernhard Schnackenburg, *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Museen Kassel: Gesamtkatalog,* 2 vols. (Mainz, 1996), 1:247.
4. *Portrait of a Man in a Fur Hat* (*“Jew with a Fur Hat”*), oil on panel, 26 × 19 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1750.
5. *Bust of a Man with a Fur Cap* (*“Jew in a Fur Cap”*), oil on panel, 21 x 16.5 cm, private collection, Toronto, as of 1998.
6. Abraham Bredius and Horst Gerson, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, (London, 1969), no. 250.
7. Oil on canvas, 57.5 × 71 cm, signed and dated, Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht, inv. DM/980/567; see Michiel Roscam Abbing, *De schilder & schrijver Samuel van Hoogstraten 1627–1678: Eigentijdse bronnen & oeuvre van gesigneerde schilderijen* (Leiden, 1993),104, no. 5.
8. *Portrait of a Man in a Fur Hat* (*“Jew with a Fur Hat”*), oil on panel, 26 × 19 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1750.
9. The attribution was offered in a letter from Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann to Salomon Lilian, dated 18 January 2000, with reference to the remains of a signature visible under infrared light, starting with an R. Subsequent infrared photography, however, failed to reveal any such traces. See the report by Annette Rupprecht of October 2012. The reference to viewing “under infrared light” is confusing, because a camera with an IR filter is required for all types of infrared analysis, and none is mentioned; the reference to “visible” seems to imply direct viewing under UV light, which can be done without a camera.
10. Karel Vermeeren, “Constantijn Daniël van Renesse, zijn leven en zijn werken (I),” *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 30, no. 1 (1978): 13.
11. See the author’s entries on two paintings by this artist in David de Witt, *The Bader Collection: Dutch and Flemish Paintings* (Kingston, 2008), 274–6, nos. 166, 167.
12. Of the known versions of the present painting, only the one in Kassel is paired with a painting of the

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same subject as Samuel van Hoogstraten’s print of a man in profile, in a similar format and with similar handling. The two works likely served as Van Hoogstraten’s models and can be traced back together to the collection of Johann Hendrik van Wassenaer Obdam in The Hague in 1750. See Michael J. Eissenhauer, ed., *Rembrandt-Bilder: Die historische Sammlung der Kasseler Gemäldegalerie* (Exh. cat. Kassel, Staatliche Museen Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) (Kassel 2006), 185–93, nos. 24, 25.

13. See Michael Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt: Jews and the Christian Image in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (Berkeley, 2002), 46–48, with reference to the Kassel version of the present composition; see also Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 2nd ed. (London, 1973), 104–5.
14. For a contrary opinion on Rembrandt’s use of Jewish models, see Gary Schwartz, *The Rembrandt Book* (New York, 2006), 299–305.
15. Stephen Nadler, *Rembrandt’s Jews* (Chicago, 2003), 32.

Provenance

- Dr. Fatou, Paris, by 1931.
- [Galerie Neumann, Paris, by 1936].
- Private collection, The Netherlands, from Galerie Neumann (sale, Christie’s, London, 4 July 1997, no. 256, as attributed to Gerbrand van den Eeckhout).
- [Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam, 2000, as by Constantijn Daniel van Renesse].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Exhibition History

- Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum, “The ‘Jewish’ Rembrandt: The Myth Unraveled,” 10 November 2006–4 February 2007, as by Constantijn Daniel van Renesse [lent by Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam].
- Munich, Haus der Kunst, “Tronies: Marlene Dumas and the Old Masters,” 29 October 2010–6 February 2011, as by School of Rembrandt, possibly Constantijn Daniel van Renesse [lent by the present owner].

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- Alexander-Knotter, Mirjam, Jasper Hillegers, and Edward van Voolen. “Portrait of a Young Jew.” In *The “Jewish” Rembrandt: The Myth Unraveled*, 74, as by Constantijn Daniel van Renesse. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum. Zwolle, 2008.
- Dumas, Marlene, Chris Dercon, and Leon Krempel, eds. *Tronies: Marlene Dumas and the Old Masters*. Exh. cat. Munich, Haus der Kunst. Munich, 2010, 46, 109, as by School of Rembrandt, possibly Constantijn Daniel van Renesse.

Versions

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1. Workshop of Rembrandt, *Bust of a Man with a Fur Cap*, oil on panel, 21.3 x 18 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Museen Kassel, inv. no. GK 248.
2. Follower of Rembrandt, *Portrait of a Man in a Fur Hat (“Jew with a Fur Hat”)*, oil on panel, 26 x 19 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1750.
3. Workshop of Rembrandt, *Bust of a Man with a Fur Cap (“Jew in a Fur Cap”)*, 21 x 16.5 cm, private collection, Toronto, as of 1998.
4. Attributed to Rembrandt, *A Jew in a Fur Hat*, 21 x 17 cm, previously Galerie Národní, Prague.
5. Attributed to Rembrandt, *Head of an Elderly Jew*, oil on panel, previously Charles J. Rosenbloom collection, Pittsburgh.
6. Attributed to Rembrandt, *Man in a Fur Cap (“A Jew with a Fur Cap”)*, oil on panel, 21 x 16.8 cm, previously Jacques Stern collection, Princeton, New Jersey.
7. Attributed to Rembrandt, *Portrait of a Portuguese Jew*, oil on panel, 18 x 17 cm, previous sale, Arnold van Buuren sale, Sotheby’s, Amsterdam, 26–27 May 1925, no. 103.
8. Attributed to Rembrandt, *Portrait of a Bearded Man*, oil on panel, 22.8 x 17.7 cm, previous sale, Christie’s, London, 14 May 1971, no. 51.

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9. Attributed to Rembrandt, untitled, previous sale, Johnson sale, Bukowski, Stockholm, 13–15 December 1933.
10. Attributed to Rembrandt, *Head of a Jew in a Fur Cap*, previously Newhouse Galleries, New York.
11. Manner of Rembrandt, *A Peasant Man, Head and Shoulders, in a Fur Hat*, oil on panel, 19.4 x 15.6 cm, previous sale, Christie’s, London, 18 February 1998, no. 172.
12. After Rembrandt, oil on canvas, 21.3 x 18 cm, private collection, Australia.

Print

1. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Bust of a Man with a Beard and a Fur Hat (Portrait of Jan van Leyden)*, 1646, etching, 140 x 110 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-10168.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of horizontally grained but vertically oriented rectangular Eastern Baltic oak from a tree felled after 1593, is unthinned and uncradled and has bevels along all four sides.[1] The bevels along the upper and left edges are narrower than the remaining two and somewhat irregularly cut; they may have been trimmed before the painting was executed. The panel reverse has five import stamps, handwritten numerals, and machine tool marks but no wax seals, labels, stencils or panel maker’s marks.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied, followed by paint applied extremely thinly with smooth glazes that allow the ground and horizontal wood grain to show through the flesh tones. There is no use of impasto, although there are areas of low brushmarking along the strokes of dark paint used to define the figure’s hat, beard and garment. Fingerprints made in wet paint are located along the lower left edge and the left side of the lower edge.

The painting is unsigned and undated; however, a letter written by Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann to Salomon Lilian in Amsterdam, dated 18 January 2000, states: “Infrared light shows that your painting is signed with a capital R, followed by space for more letters. It is very well possible that this R was the beginning of Renesse. The clue may be given by the Warsaw painting, which according to Sumowski, is signed and dated C…Ren…1693. In my opinion your painting *Portrait of a Young Jew* may be attributed to Daniel van Renesse. It fits well into his work of the 1650s.” [2]

No underdrawing, compositional changes, or the letter R mentioned in Haverkamp-Begemann’s letter are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers.

The painting underwent conservation treatment prior to its acquisition and is in good condition.

Technical Summary Endnotes

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1. The characterization of the wood is based on Ian Tyers’s 2010 dendrochronology report. According to Peter Klein’s earlier dendrochronology report, only the wider plank could be analyzed and dated.
2. Provided by Sara Smith, collections manager, The Leiden Collection.

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