THE LEIDEN COLLECTION



Bust of an Old Man

Attributed to Gerrit Dou
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1640–45
oil on oval panel
20.4 x 17.8 cm
JvS-101

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This little oval painting barely measures the size of a human hand, yet its powerful, bust-length representation of an old man with piercing eyes operates like a magnetic force: it commands our attention and pulls us closer, imploring us to return the man's gaze with equal intensity. Illuminated by a strong light coming from the upper left, the man's face is turned toward us, the shimmering highlights of his short, silver hair, long moustache, and modest beard in contrast with the dark background. His rather unassuming attire consists of a nondescript brown coat over a blue shirt and a simple pleated white collar, the strings of which are carelessly resting on his clothing rather than tucked away. The informality of this little painting indicates that this is not a commissioned portrait, but a *tronie*, a study of a facial type or expression. Indeed, the old man's exceptionally stern look and furrowed brow betray an individual with a strong character.

With impeccable mastery, this *tronie* appears to have been executed quickly. The artist merely indicated the contours of the sitter's proper left ear, which is entirely in the dark, and used a single brushstroke to suggest the presence of his right one. Instead, he focused on the intricate reflections of light on the man's aged skin. With swift strokes of a relatively broad brush he built up the cheeks by alternating brown and creamy pink hues. He used a slightly thinner brush for the single dark brown line above the man's proper right eye. For the man's impressive furrows between his eyes, the artist applied broad strokes of flesh tones and slightly thinner strokes of darker paint for the shadows in between the wrinkles. He executed the forehead in a rich impasto of pinks and creams, culminating in the protruding white highlights just below the hairline **(fig 1)**. Unlike these intact paint layers, the dark areas of the painting have suffered from abrasion due to over-cleaning, particularly in the man's clothing, the pupils of his eyes, and along the peripheries of the background.[1] The abrasion in the mantle reveals the sketchy brushwork of an earlier paint stage, probably the undermodeling.

This unpublished work was unknown until it appeared on the art market in 2003 as attributed to Jan van Staveren (1613/14–69), a presumed student of Gerrit Dou (1613–75).[2] It is, however, highly unlikely that Van Staveren, with his smooth brushwork and somewhat wooden figures, is the artist who made this loosely painted, vivacious bust.[3] The appearance of the old man certainly differs from Van Staveren's generally fantastical *tronies*, in which the sitters' features and expressions are more generic.[4] The sitter instead resembles Gerrit Dou's small, oval *Bust of a Bearded Man*, dated ca. 1642–45, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (formerly at the

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Detail of *Bust of an Old Man*, JvS-101, showing the forehead with rich impasto highlights



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *Bust of a Bearded Man*, ca. 1642–45, oil on panel, 18.4 x 14.9 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection), 2014.136.32



Fig 3. Gerrit Dou, *Schoolmaster*, 1645, oil on panel, 27 x 19.4 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, inv. no. 33, © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

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Corcoran Gallery of Art) **(fig 2)**.[5] The man in the latter painting in fact has the same strong nose, bushy grey beard, long mustache, deep-set eyes, and pronounced brow, leaving no doubt that the two paintings are of the same sitter.

The Washington, D.C. *tronie* is one of Dou's most informal, freely executed paintings, but it is still more refined than the Leiden Collection painting. Unlike the latter work, with its thick, patchy strokes, Dou modeled the Washington painting using his characteristic short, individual brushstrokes. The hair and beard of the man depicted in that painting were also rendered more carefully, and one can distinguish individual strands of grey curls.[6] There are, however, also some important similarities between these works. The handling of the shaded sides of the two faces and the indication of the proper left ears are almost identical in both paintings; moreover, alternating brown and cream hues were used to model the wrinkles in between the eyes. These correlations, together with the high quality of the present painting and the immediacy of the portrait, make it plausible that Dou also painted this work. If so, Dou here appears to have captured the sitter in a quick, initial sketch, before executing the more thought out Washington painting, which would explain the slight differences in painting technique.[7]

The sitter depicted in both *tronies* can also be recognized in Dou's *Schoolmaster*, 1645, in which an old teacher, surrounded by the children he is helping to read, looks directly at the viewer **(fig 3)**.[8] The stern expression and position of the man's head are identical to those in the Leiden Collection panel. Dou may well have referred to the latter painting when executing *Schoolmaster*, using it as a reference point for the teacher's facial expression.

Traditionally, the model in the Washington painting has been identified as Dou's father, the glass painter Douwe Jansz (ca. 1584–1656).[9] The appearance of his father is known from Dou's *Self-Portrait,* ca. 1649, in Braunschweig, in which the artist holds a small portrait of his parents and brother **(fig 4) (fig 5)**.[10] Although scholars have expressed some doubt as to whether the sitter in the Washington painting is identical to that in the family portrait, the two men have similar facial features, including the pronounced, straight nose, deep-set eyes, beard, and moustache.[11] The similarities are even more pronounced between the sitters in the Leiden Collection *tronie* and the Braunschweig painting, since both men face the viewer and wear similar collars. In the early 1640s, when the Leiden Collection and Washington paintings were executed, Douwe Jansz would have been in his



Fig 4. Gerrit Dou, *Self-Portrait Holding a Portrait of His Parents and Brother*, ca. 1649, oil on panel, 27 x 23 cm, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig



Fig 5. Detail of Gerrit Dou, *Self-Portrait Holding a Portrait of His Parents and Brother*, ca. 1649, oil on panel, 27 x 23 cm, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig

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late fifties or early sixties, an age that corresponds with the age of the sitter in each work.[12] It seems appropriate to reconsider the traditional identification of this sitter as Dou's father, an identification that would help to explain the intimate character of the work. Dou may well have been able to render this figure so expressively because he knew the sitter so well.[13]

At least two nearly identical versions of the painting exist. The first was offered for sale at a 1900 auction in Florence, with a mistaken attribution to Ferdinand Bol (1616–80).[14] The second was in the Sir Charles Turner Collection as by Thomas de Keyser (1596–1667) until 1908, after which Abraham Bredius attributed it to Dou.[15] A third painting, formerly in the Baron van der Felz Collection, is a free copy after the Washington painting, in which the sitter is facing left and directed at the viewer, with an expression strikingly similar to the Leiden Collection panel.[16] Unfortunately, the locations of these paintings are unknown, making any kind of stylistic comparison impossible. Judging from old photographs, however, these works appear to be flatter in execution and more generic than the present work, which suggests that the Leiden Collection panel is, indeed, the original.

- Ilona van Tuinen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. See the Technical Summary. Annette Rupprecht observes that in these dark passages, small spots of ground and bare wood have been exposed. It is not known when this damaging treatment took place.
2. Sale, Christie's, London, 12 December 2003, no. 42 (unsold). On the relationship between Jan van Staveren and Gerrit Dou, see Piet Bakker's biography on the former in this catalogue.
3. See, for instance, the signed Jan van Staveren painting in this catalogue, *Esther before Ahasuerus*, JvS-100, in which the paint is applied more evenly and meticulously and in which the pointed facial types differ greatly from the features of this man.
4. See for instance, *Tronie of an Old Man in a Turban*, attributed to Van Staveren (sale, Bonhams, London, 5 May 2006, no. 45).
5. Ronni Baer, "Bust of a Man," in "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)" (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 39; eadem, "Bust of a Man," 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) (New Haven, 2000), 84–85, no. 11. Many thanks to Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Dominique Surh for mentioning the Washington painting in relation to the painting discussed here.
6. For a discussion of Dou's technique in this painting, see Ronni Baer, "Bust of a Man," 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) (New Haven, 2000), 84–85, no. 11.
7. I am indebted to Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. for the conversations we had about this work and for his suggestion of an attribution to Dou. I would like to extend my thanks to Ronni Baer for generously conveying her opinion on the attribution of this painting (e-mail correspondence of July 2014 on file at the Leiden Collection, New York). Baer places the work in the circle of Dou. She notes that *Bust of an Old Man* comes closest in execution to *Bust of an Old Woman* in Brodick Castle (oil on panel with an arched top, 11.5 x 8.7 cm, Isle of Arran [Scotland], Brodick Castle, National Trust for Scotland; see Ronni Baer, "Old Woman," "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou [1613–1675]" [PhD diss. New York University, 1990], no. 32, where Baer dates the work to ca. 1640), especially in the "broad sketchiness of the garment," but that the "scale of the brushwork is different," especially since the Leiden Collection work does not contain the "multi-hued, very small, individual brushstrokes."
8. See Ronni Baer, "Bust of a Man," 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

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Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (New Haven, 2000), 84–85, no. 11.

9. For a discussion of this conception, initiated by John Smith in 1829 and supported by Wilhelm Martin, see Ronni Baer, “Bust of a Man,” “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 39; Ronni Baer, “Bust of a Man,” in Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt,* ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (New Haven, 2000), 84–85, no. 11.
10. See Ronni Baer, “Self-Portrait,” in “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 56.
11. For scholars who have expressed their doubts about this identification, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “A Reappraisal of Gerard Dou’s Reputation,” in *The William A. Clark Collection: An Exhibition Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Clark Collection at the Corcoran Gallery of Art* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., The Corcoran Gallery of Art) (Washington, D.C., 1978), 61; Ronni Baer, “Bust of a Man,” in “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 39; eadem, “Bust of a Man,” 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) (New Haven, 2000), 84–85, no. 11.
12. See Ronni Baer, “Bust of a Man,” in “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)” (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 39, who suggests that the Braunschweig painting might well have been a commemorative painting, executed ca. 1649, after the deaths of Dou’s mother in 1647 and Dou’s brother in 1649. This would help to explain why Dou’s father, with his dark rather than grey hair, looks younger than his age in 1649, and younger than in the New York and Washington paintings.
13. By comparison, when we see Dou’s drawn oval portrait of his mother, signed and dated 1638, her strong gaze, full of character and depth, is equally striking. See Gerrit Dou, *Portrait of the Artist’s Mother*, 1638, black chalk and ink with white highlights, 19.1 x 16.8 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 22.579, published in Frits Lugt, *Musée du Louvre: Inventaire Général des Dessins des Ecoles du Nord*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929), 34, no. 248.
14. *Bust of a Middle-Aged Man*, dating, technique, and measurements unknown, formerly in the Princess Marie Wassilievna Woronzow Collection (her sale, Florence, Sambon, 23 April 1900, no. 465). Albert Blankert rejected the attribution to Bol, see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. R 158, under “Rejected Attributions.” There are a few very small differences between the present work and the panel auctioned in Florence, such as the position of the man’s collar and the height of his head.
15. *Bust of a Man*, oil on oval panel, 18 x 14.5 cm, formerly in the Sir Charles Turner Collection (his sale, Rudolph Lepke, Berlin, 17 November 1908, no. 37). This painting, if the

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measurements are correct, is slightly smaller than the Leiden Collection work. Other differences are the distance between the man's head and the edge of the painting at top right. According to a note on the RKD photo mount, this painting was last seen at art dealer E. Burg Berger in Berlin in ca. 1943. The same mount records that Abraham Bredius thought the painting to be by Dou.

16. *Bust of a Man*, technique and measurements unknown, formerly in the L. A. S. J. Baron van der Felz Collection in Brummen, the Netherlands. See also Ronni Baer, "Bust of a Man," in "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)" (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), no. 39, who was the first to list this painting as a free copy after the former Corcoran work (now at the National Gallery of Art).

Provenance

- (Sale, Christie's, London, 12 December 2003, no. 42 (unsold); [The Weiss Gallery, London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner, 2004.

References

- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. "The Leiden Collection and the Dutch Golden Age." In *The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection*. Edited by Polina Lyubimova, 17; 28, n. 5. Translated by Daria Babich and Daria Kuzina. Exh. cat. Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts; St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum. Moscow, 2018.

Versions

Versions and Copies

1. Formerly attributed to Ferdinand Bol, *Bust of a Middle-Aged Man*, dating, technique, and measurements unknown, formerly in the Princess Marie Wassilievna Woronzow Collection (her sale, Florence, Sambon, 23 April 1900, no. 465).
2. Formerly attributed to Thomas de Keijser, *Bust of a Middle-Aged Man*, oil on oval panel, 18 x

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14.5 cm, formerly in the Sir Charles Turner Collection (his sale, Rudolph Lepke, Berlin, 17 November 1908, no. 37).

Technical Summary

The support, a single oval plank of vertically grained oak, is unthinned and uncradled and has hand tool marks and machine tool marks.[1] A horizontally oriented bevel cuts across the upper midpoint and an oval shaped bevel follows the circumference of the remaining plank. There is a black stencil, a black inscription, white chalk, blue tape, and white label remnants but no import stamp or panel maker's mark along the panel reverse.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. An additional light-colored fill material appears to have been previously applied to the thickness of the entire outer edge of the oval panel. Narrow crescents of the light-colored fill, which have been toned brown, are present along the thickness of the left and right panel edges. The upper and lower edges have been trimmed, the fill material removed, and the bare wood exposed.

The paint along the background and garment is fairly thin, while a halo of opaque denser paint surrounds the figure's head. The flesh tones and horizontal brush strokes that create the creases of the brow, mustache, and white collar have been applied with slightly raised brushwork.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 750–1000 nanometers or in the X-radiograph.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2003 and remains in a fair state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination only.

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