THE LEIDEN COLLECTION



Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat

Circle of Rembrandt van Rijn

probably early 1650s
oil on canvas
114 x 96.2 cm
GE-101

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

How to cite

Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. "Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat" (2017). In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge. New York, 2023–. https://theleidencollection.com/artwork/jacob-shown-josephs-bloody-coat/ (accessed November 25, 2026).

A PDF of every version of this entry is available in this Online Catalogue's Archive, and the Archive is managed by a permanent URL. New versions are added only when a substantive change to the narrative occurs.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

The Old Testament story of Joseph fueled the imagination of Dutch artists, not only for the marvelous exploits of the young leader, but also for the jealousies, deceits and betrayals that mark the complex narrative of his life.[1] The cause of many of those jealousies was the coat of many colors that his father, Jacob, had presented to him as a sign that he was the favored son. The tragic consequences, when Joseph's brothers turned against him, are described in Genesis 37:12–35. When Joseph, having been sent by his father to report on the status of his brothers who were herding sheep, found them in the land of Dothan, his brethren conspired to kill him. However, Reuben, one of the brothers, dissuaded them from committing fratricide and, instead, they threw Joseph into a pit. Although Reuben intended to rescue Joseph and return him to his father, Joseph was taken to Egypt after the others sold him to passing Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Reuben, upon discovering that Joseph was missing, then conspired with his brothers to deceive Jacob into believing that Joseph had been eaten by a wild beast. To feign his death they dipped Joseph's coat in the blood of a goat, which they then took to the aged patriarch. Seeing the bloody coat, Jacob tore his garments in grief, donned sackcloth, and, taking no comfort in his family's consolations, mourned Joseph's loss.

In this dramatic visualization of the story, one feels the full horror of the moment Jacob sees the bloody coat held up before him, and can almost hear Jacob's anguished cry piercing through the late afternoon darkness. His flailing arms and legs reveal an inconsolable man devastated by the dreadful news that a wild beast has killed his favorite son. The biblical text implies that Reuben, presumably the tall gesticulating shepherd standing just behind the brother holding the bloody coat, was the spokesman for the brothers. Other family members, including a praying man in the lower left, try to support Jacob physically and emotionally, but to no avail. Two dogs, one drawn to the blood on the cloak and one to the aged patriarch, reinforce the drama of the story. Other figures, curious about the uproar but not daring to come too close, congregate near the arched entranceway of the courtyard.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, a number of Dutch artists depicted this biblical story of betrayal and deceit, beginning with Jan Pynas (1581–1631), who executed his large panel painting *Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat* in 1618 **(fig 1)**. Pynas likewise poignantly depicted an inconsolable Jacob grieving over the bloody coat, surrounded by caring members of his family. Jan Lievens (1607–74) must have known Pynas's forceful representation of this scene when he depicted this subject in a large painting in the mid 1640s **(fig 2)**. As in Pynas's image, Jacob, having been shown the bloody cloak, sits with crossed arms and refuses to be comforted by his family. Lievens intensified the dramatic moment by bringing the action closer to the viewer and eliminating compositional elements that Pynas had included to place the

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jan Pynas, *Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat,* 1618, oil on panel, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, inv. 5588



Fig 2. Jan Lievens, *Jacob Receiving Joseph's Bloody Coat*, probably mid 1640s, oil on canvas, Collection Joseph and Lieve Guttmann, USA



Fig 3. Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout, *Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat*, c. 1665, pen and brown ink and gray washes, Musée du Louve, Paris, 22.906

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

scene within a larger narrative framework. Lievens also altered Jacob's posture, making it more rigid, and depicted him with his eyes closed, signaling that he has hardened his heart to the entreaties of those around him.

Joost van den Vondel expressly cited Pynas's painting as a source of inspiration for his tragedy *Joseph in Dothan*, published in 1640. In his introduction to the play, Van den Vondel wrote that "in the closing [passages] of this work, [we] have tried to emulate with words, as far as we can, the painter's colors, drawings, and passions."[2] The passions Van den Vondel was able to invoke are evident in the concerns of Jacob's eldest son, Reuben, who, imagining how the scene would unfold when Jacob was shown the bloody coat, mused:

> Methinks I see with what a piteous gesture
> He throws up his arms and sinks backwards,
> His head bare; his whole countenance assuming
> The nature of a corpse: the maidens, children, youths,
> Our women, mothers, and th'entire household
> Throng in at his lament: the little Benjamin,
> Standing at his feet, at the weeping of the mothers,
> Weeps unaware at the loss of his trusty brother.[3]

Van den Vondel's play was a huge success and was shown numerous times at the Amsterdam Schouwburg during the 1640s and 1650s,[4] and the play inspired some of the varied depictions of this story that Amsterdam artists made during these years.[5] The most theatrical of these paintings, the Leiden Collection work is an almost verbatim portrayal of Reuben's vision of the distraught Jacob throwing up his arms in despair while his household gathers to support him in his misery, and it seems probable that Van den Vondel's play had a huge impact on its character. The many associations between the painting and the play suggest that the painting dates from the early 1650s, when the play was at the height of its popularity.

This large and impressive canvas was long thought to have been painted by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), but this attribution has not been upheld for a number of years. Most recently, Werner Sumowski has proposed that the painting was executed in the mid- to late 1660s by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), largely on the basis of similarities that exist between it and Van den Eeckhout's drawing of the same subject in the Louvre **(fig 3)**.[6] He concluded that the drawing, which he dates to the mid- to late 1660s, was a preliminary study for the painting.[7]

The striking similarities between the drawing and the painting initially seem to substantiate Sumowski's conclusion. In each work the distraught Jacob lies at the

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

lower right with his arms spread wide as family members try to comfort him, while in the immediate background a large architectural structure with an arched opening frames a view into the distance. Nevertheless, sufficient differences exist between the two works—for example, in the angle of Jacob's outthrust arms, and the number and disposition of the figures populating the scene—to suggest that the drawing was an independent creation only loosely connected to the painting.

A date in the mid- to late 1660s does not accord with the stylistic character of Van den Eeckhout's paintings at that stage of his career. In the 1660s, Van den Eeckhout preferred quieter subjects, presenting Old Testament narratives in an understated manner rather than emphatically stressing the drama, as in this work. In his later works he modeled his figures quite carefully and gave his scenes added pictorial interest by articulating costume details, including the textures of their materials; such characteristics are not evident in the rough modeling seen here.

The relationship between the drawing and this painting may be explained by Van den Eeckhout's approach to creating his series of drawings on the life of Joseph: he looked to earlier depictions of the life of Joseph for inspiration and freely adapted them when creating his designs. For example, his drawing *Joseph Telling His Dreams* from that series is freely based on Rembrandt's 1638 etching of the same subject.[8] The relationship of Van den Eeckhout's drawing *Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat* to the Leiden Collection painting must be understood in a similar fashion. This painting was probably the source of inspiration for Van den Eeckhout's drawing.

The question then remains whether *Jacob Shown Joseph's Bloody Coat* is consistent with Van den Eeckhout's style of painting from the 1650s. The story of Joseph intrigued Van den Eeckhout throughout his career, and he even made a series of drawings of the life of Joseph in the early 1640s.[9] Among the many Old Testament narratives he painted in the 1640s and 1650s, moreover, are a number that depict episodes from the life of Joseph. He executed these paintings in a rough, expressive manner that he must have learned when studying with Rembrandt in the late 1630s. Generally, Van den Eeckhout preferred a rather dark, expansive setting for his scenes, and he accented his figures with dramatically focused light effects and rich colors, much as in the present painting. Nevertheless, the manner in which the Leiden Collection painting is executed differs fundamentally from these works. The blocky, somewhat inelegant forms of the figures and the splotchy brushwork used to model them, where the artist seems to have roughly dabbed his paint onto the canvas without modulating the planes of color, differ from the more fluid brushwork that characterizes Van den Eeckhout's style of painting.

Unfortunately, an alternative attribution for this painting has yet to be found.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Although the dramatic focus of the composition, the chiaroscuro effects, and the rough brushwork are all broadly related to works being produced by artists working within Rembrandt's orbit around mid-century—including Willem Drost (1633–59), Carel Fabritius (1622–54), Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), Jan Lievens, Nicolaes Maes (1634–93), Constantijn van Renesse (1626–80), and Jan Victors (1619–after 1676)—no precise comparable examples have thus far been identified. Until such such works appear, it seems appropriate to label this expressive and emotionally charged painting as "Circle of Rembrandt," and to date it to the early 1650s.

- Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 2017

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Endnotes

1. See Christian Tümpel in *Im Lichte Rembrandts: Das Alte Testament im Goldenen Zeitalter der niederländischen Kunst* (Exh. cat. Münster, , Westphalian State Museum of Art and Cultural History; Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum; Jerusalem, Israel Museum) (Munich, 1994), 41–47.
2. "Daer de bloedige rock den Vader vertoont wort: gelijck wy in 't suiten van dit werck, ten naesten by, met woorden des schilders verwen, teickeningen, en hartstoghten, pooghden na te volgen." Joost van den Vondel, *De werken van Vondel,* ed. Leo Simons et al., 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1929–37), 4: 74.
3. Joost van den Vondel, *De werken van Vondel,* ed. Leo Simons et al., 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1929–37), 4: 74. The English translation is taken from Jeroen GIltaij, Guido Jansen, and Josua Bruyn, *Een gloeiend palet: Schilderijen van Rembrandt en zijn School, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen* (Rotterdam, 1988), 98, no. 32.
4. Jacob Adolf Worp, *Geschiedenis van den Amsterdamschen schouwburg 1496–1772*, ed. J. F. M. Sterck (Amsterdam, 1920), 95.
5. Aside from Jan Lievens and Jan Victors, Rembrandt van Rijn, in his drawing from the mid-1650s in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, also depicted this subject. For Victors's painting in the Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw, see Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 4: 2600, no. 1739. For Rembrandt's drawing, see Jeroen GIltaij, Guido Jansen, and Josua Bruyn, *Een gloeiend palet: Schilderijen van Rembrandt en zijn School, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen* (Rotterdam, 1988), 98–9.
6. Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, ed. and trans. Walter L. Strauss, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–92), 3: 1422–23, no. 656; 1772, fig. 46. 9, no. 32.
7. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–84), 2: 737, no. 451.
8. Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School,* ed. and trans. Walter L. Strauss, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–92), 3:1416–17, no. 653, which reflects an element from Rembrandt's etching *Joseph Telling His Dreams* (B.37).
9. Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, ed. and trans. Walter L. Strauss, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–92), 3:1504–14, nos. 697x–702x. Van den Eeckhout, however, never completed this cycle.

Provenance

- Jean-Baptist-Pierre Lebrun (1748–1813) (his sale, Paris, 20 December 1773, no. 12 [1,160 francs to Doujeu], as by Rembrandt).

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

- Sir Robert Strange (1721–92), London (his sale, Christie's, London, 5–6 May 1775, no. 116 [for 65 gns.], as by Rembrandt).
- Edward Smith-Stanley (1752–1834), 12th Earl of Derby, Lancashire Park, England, by 1818, and by descent until 2000 (sale, Christie's, London, 13 December 2000, no. 5, unsold as attributed to Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout [with Simon Dickinson, New York, 2009]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2009.

Exhibition History

- London, British Institution, 1818, 18, no. 139 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- London, British Institution, 1855, 11, no. 95 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- London, British Institution, 1867, 12, no. 127 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- London, Royal Academy, Winter Exhibition, 1899, 31, no. 98 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, "Rembrandt," 8 September–31 October 1898, no. 105 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- London, Royal Academy (Burlington House), 1899, no. 98;
- London, Grafton Galleries, 1911, 56, no. 58 [lent by the Earl of Derby, as by Rembrandt];
- Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 27 March–11 December 1979, permanent gallery exhibition [lent by the Earl of Derby, as attributed to the Circle of Fabritius].
- Philadelphia Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, October 2013–October 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, "Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 11 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Smith, John. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters.* 9 vols. London, 1829–42, 7:7, no. 19.
- Scharf, George. *A Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the Collection at Knowsley Hall.* London, 1875, no. 494.
- Vosmaer, Carel. *Rembrandt, sa vie et ses oeuvre*. 2nd edition. Paris, 1877, 519.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

- Sweetser, Moses Foster. *Rembrandt*. Boston, 1879, 153.
- Von Bode, Wilhelm. *Studien zur Geschichte der holländischen Malerei*. Braunschweig, 1883, 525, 586, no. 202.
- Dutuit, Eugène. *Tableaux et dessins de Rembrandt*. Paris, 1885, 44.
- Michel, Émile. *Rembrandt: His Life, His Work, and His Time*. Translated by Florence Simmonds. 2 vols. New York, 1894, 2:235. Originally published as *Rembrandt, sa vie, son oeuvre et son temps.* Paris, 1893.
- Von Bode, Wilhelm, and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot. *Rembrandt: beschreibendes Verzeichniss seiner Gemälde mit den heliographischen Nachbildungen: Geschichte seines Lebens und seiner Kunst*. 8 vols. Paris, 1897–1906, 5: 80, no. 335; 7:211, no. 335.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *De Rembrandt Tentoonstelling te Amsterdam*. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum. Amsterdam, 1898, no. 105.
- Bell, Malcom. *Rembrandt van Rijn.* London, 1901, 74, 127.
- Valentiner, Wilhelm. *Rembrandt, Des Meisters Gemälde.* Stuttgart and Berlin, 1908, 303, 559, no. 303.
- Bredius, Abraham. *Kunstler-Inventare: Urkunden zur Geschichte der hollandischen Kunst des XVIten, XVIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhunderts*. 8 vols. The Hague, 1915, 1:1742.
- 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: 31, no. 15. 8 vols. London, 1907–28. Originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten höllandischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28.
- Tatlock, Robert Rattray. "Two Pictures from the School of Rembrandt." *Burlington Magazine* 39 (1921): 195–96.
- Martin, Wilhelm. *Rembrandt-Rätsel: Zu Valentiners neuem Rembrandt-Band*. Berlin, 1921, 30.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *Die holländische Kritik der jetzigen Rembrandt-Forschung und neust weidergefundene Rembrandtbilder*. Stuttgart and Berlin, 1922, 20.
- Valentiner, Wilhelm R. *Rembrandt, des Meisters Handzeichnungen*. 2 vols. Stuttgart, Berlin, and Leipzig, 1924, 1: 101, 468, no. 102.
- De Lint, Jan Gérard. *Rembrandt*. The Hague, 1930, 14, fig. 3.
- Benesch, Otto. *The Drawings of Rembrandt: A Critical and Chronological Catalogue*. 6 vols. London, 1957, 5: 285, under no. 991, fig. 1204.
- Sumowski, Werner. *Bemerkungen zu Otto Beneschs Corpus der Rembrandt-Zeichnungen ll.* Bad Pyrmont, 1961, 18, no. 991.
- Schneider, Hans. *Jan Lievens: Sein Leben und seine Werke*. Haarlem, 1932. Reprinted with supplement by Rudolf Otto Ekkart, Amsterdam, 1973, 170, no. 1.
- Sumowski, Werner. *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*. 10 vols. Edited and translated by Walter L. Strauss, 3: 1422, no. 656, 1772, fig. 46. New York, 1979–92.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

- Sumowski, Werner. *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*. 6 vols. Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94, 2: 737, no. 451, 814.
- Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr., Christiaan Vogelaar, and Caroline van Cauwenberge. *Rembrandt and His Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection.* Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam. Zwolle, 2023, 58–61, no. 11. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

Versions
Related Drawings

1. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, *Jacob Receiving Joseph's Blood-Stained Tunic*, ca. 1665, pen and brown ink and gray washes, 205 x 162 mm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 22.906.
2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Jacob Is Shown Joseph's Blood-stained Coat,* c. 1655, pen and bistre, in some parts covered with white body-color, 133 x 179 mm, Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (formerly F. Koenigs Collection, Rotterdam).

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of coarse, plain-weave fabric, has been lined. The lower tacking margin has been turned out and the remaining tacking margins have been removed. There is broad cusping along the upper and lower edges and slight cusping along the left and right edges. A narrow fabric addition with a horizontal seam has been added to the lower edge. The composite support has been lined and the original composition, which ends below the heel and knee of the kneeling male figure, has been extended and the entire foot has been completed on the lower fabric addition. There are three paper labels but no wax collection seals, stencils or import stamps along the lining or stretcher.

The ground, which appears to be red, has been evenly applied. The paint has been applied in a loose, sketchy manner (different in handling and with none of the fine details and brushwork present in GE-100). Sets of sweeping, arched, parallel scratches along the upper right quadrant of the composition, located above, through, and to the left of the architectural arch as well as through the figures, suggest this area of the composition has been scraped and reworked.[1]

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Dark underdrawn lines are visible as pentimenti through the dog in the lower right corner's white fur. A more complete underdrawing may be visible in wavelengths that penetrate further into the infrared region. Further investigation is required.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since acquisition in 2009 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. There is no X-radiograph of this painting which could provide further information.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection