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Portrait of a Man

Gerard ter Borch the Younger
(Zwolle 1617 – 1681 Deventer)

ca. 1653
oil on panel
23.8 x 18 cm
GB-109

How to cite

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This simple half-length portrait demonstrates Gerard ter Borch the Younger 's exceptional ability to convey an effective likeness with a modicum of means. The man, perhaps of early middle age, is dressed plainly in a black costume enlivened only by a simple collar and narrow cuffs of white linen. A black cloak is pulled close around his portly frame, and he clutches a pair of fawn-colored gloves in his left hand.

Portrait of a Man probably dates to about 1653. Together with the *Portrait of Jan van Goyen* **(fig 1)** and another portrait of an unidentified sitter **(fig 2)**, both of which date to about 1652–53, The Leiden Collection's image is among Ter Borch's earliest half-length portraits in a rectangular format.[1] All these paintings depict the subject facing three-quarters to the right, with the solid pyramidal bulk of their figures silhouetted against a neutral background. The sitters are remarkably devoid of pretense, and each regards the viewer in an unusually relaxed and open manner.

Portrait of a Man is painted on a single horizontally grained plank of wood, presumably oak. The edges are not beveled. The panel appears to have been trimmed along the left side and possibly also along the top;[2] it may originally have shared the slightly wider proportions of Ter Borch's *Portrait of Jan van Goyen* mentioned above.

At the time the painting was sold in 2000 there were two labels on the back of the panel, one indicating that the painting had at one time been in the collection of Georges Mieg, and the other providing an old auction catalogue description with the number "247." Both labels have since been removed. The Mieg family was one of the leading industrial families in Mulhouse, France; in 1800, together with the Dollfus family, they founded Dollfus-Mieg & Compagnie (DMC), one of the largest European producers of fabric and embroidery thread. Georges Mieg (1865–1924) was an amateur musician and avid supporter of cultural institutions in Mulhouse. Both his father, Mathieu (1821–73), and grandfather, Jean-Georges (1788–1864), were collectors, notably of paintings and objects relating to the history of Mulhouse.[3] On the reverse of the panel is a red wax seal. Though worn, the impressed forms are not inconsistent with (and probably represent) the arms of the Mieg family.[4]

- Henriette Rahusen, 2017

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of Jan van Goyen*, ca. 1652–53, oil on panel, 20 x 16 cm, The Princely Collections, Liechtenstein, Vaduz–Vienna, inv. GE893



Fig 2. Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of a Man*, ca. 1652–53, oil on panel, 28 x 23 cm, private collection

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Endnotes

1. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2:104–5, nos. 93 and 92 respectively. See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. et al., *Gerard ter Borch* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Detroit Institute of Arts) (Zwolle, 2005), 97–99 (*Portrait of Jan van Goyen*, no. 21) and 100–1 (*Portrait of a Man*, no. 22); additionally on *Portrait of a Man*, see Peter C. Sutton, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings: The Collection of Willem Baron van Dedem* (London, 2002), 38–41.
2. See the Technical Summary prepared by Annette Rupprecht, June 2012. Viewed from the back, the panel has lighter-colored strips 3 to 5 centimeters wide along the top, left, and bottom edges (suggesting where the panel previously had been masked off), but none along the right (i. e., the left side of the panel viewed from the front). In addition, the cuts of the upper and left edges of the panel show a raised lip of unpainted wood along the front surface, suggesting that these edges have been modified.
3. Georges Mieg, “Un inspirateur du Musée Historique, Jean-George Mieg 1788–1864,” *Bulletin du Musée Historique du Mulhouse* 44 (1924): 239–56. On Georges Mieg, see Léonard-Georges Werner, “Georges Mieg (1865–1924),” *Bulletin du Musée Historique du Mulhouse* 44 (1924): 386–88.
4. See Nicolas Ehrsam, *Livre d’or (Bürgerbuch) de la ville de Mulhouse*, rev. ed. (Mulhouse, 1883), pl. 111.

Provenance

- (possibly) Mathieu Mieg (1821–73), Mulhouse; by descent to Georges Mieg (1865–1924), Mulhouse; his widow, Mme Marie-Valentine Mieg-De Coninck (1875–1963).
- Private collection, France; (sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 15 December 2000, no. 146 [as attributed to Ter Borch, for 65,000 francs to Kunsthandel P. de Boer B.V., Amsterdam, 2000–6; to Bijl-Van Urk B. V., Alkmaar, 2006]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- (Possibly) Mulhouse, Musée Municipal des Beaux-Arts, “Exposition de Peintures des

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Collections Privées de Mulhouse et de sa Région, XVIe au XIXe siècle." 23 June–1 September 1959, no. 38, as *Portrait d'homme*, 26 x 21 cm (the current panel shows evidence of having been trimmed) [lent by Mme Georges Mieg].

- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, "Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries," 26 October 2014–4 January 2015; Birmingham Museum of Art, 4 February–26 April 2015, no. 4 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Musée Municipal des Beaux-Arts. *Exposition de Peintures des Collections Privées de Mulhouse et de sa Région, XVI^{e} au XIX^{e} siècle.* Exh. cat. Mulhouse, Musée Municipal des Beaux-Arts. Mulhouse, 1959, no. 38. (possibly)
- Weller, Dennis P. "Portrait of a Man." In *Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries*. Exh. cat. Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art; Birmingham, Birmingham Museum of Art. Raleigh, 2014, 52–55, no. 4.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of horizontally grained but vertically oriented rectangular-shaped oak, has no bevels but has irregularly cut edges, which suggest the panel dimensions have been modified.[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has no machine tool marks. There is one red wax collection seal and one inscription but no import stamps, stencils, labels or panel maker's marks.

A light gray-colored ground has been thinly applied. Drawing a diagonal line from the upper left corner to the lower right, the right half of the panel contains a distinct pattern of radio-opaque swirls that do not relate to the present composition.[2] The paint has been built up in successive thin layers applied thinly and smoothly light over dark through the face and dark over light through the background.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. The images and X-radiograph reveal changes in the shape of the contours of the figure's white collar.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2006 and remains in a good state of preservation.

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Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination only. There may be narrow remnants of bevels along the left and lower edges.
2. See X-radiograph.

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