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Portrait of Dirck van Beresteyn

Gerrit Dou
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1652
oil on oval silver-copper alloy
10.2 x 8.2 cm
signed in blue paint at upper right: “G Dou” (GD in ligature)
GD-111

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This small, enamel-like portrait, which portrays Dirck van Beresteyn (1627–53) shortly before his untimely death at the age of twenty-six, is one of the few instances in which the identity of one of Gerrit Dou's sitters is known.[1] His name and life dates are inscribed on the reverse of the painting **(fig 1)**.[2] Dirck was the fourth of five children from a well-to-do family in Delft, whose father and grandfather had both held prominent civic positions as burgomasters of Delft.[3] In the fall of 1647, at the age of twenty, Dirck moved to Leiden to study law at Leiden University. After the completion of his studies, he was appointed to the prestigious position of Counsel to the Hof van Holland. In November 1652 Dirck married his young cousin, Magdalena van Adrichem (1639–84) and settled in Delft on the west side of the Oude Delft.[4] In 1653 Dirck made a series of visits to the notary to establish and revise his will, which suggests that he had fallen ill or was otherwise concerned about his mortality.[5] He made his last notarial visit in September 1653 to ensure that his unborn child would be placed in the custody of his wife, mother and brother Zacharias.[6] A week later he died, leaving behind his young bride Magdalena, who would give birth to a boy some six months later. Sadly, the child would only live for a matter of hours.[7]

Dou has depicted Dirck as a composed yet dashing young man dressed in the latest fashion. He wears a small ornamental band around his neck, edged with fine lace and closed with tasseled band-strings. His black doublet, faced with buttons down its front, allows his billowing shirt to show through at the cuffs and along the slits of his sleeves.[8] A velvet-lined black cloak with additional buttons along its arms is slung around his shoulders. With beaming eyes, Dirck's bright countenance is accentuated by his long, wavy hair cascading over his shoulders. His golden hair and black-and-white attire are set off by a vibrant blue-green backdrop that appears to be a curtain.[9]

Dou must have executed this portrait sometime between 1647, when Dirck first moved to Leiden, and 1653, the year of his death. Ronni Baer suggests a date close to 1647 and relates the painting stylistically to Dou's 1646 signed and dated *Portrait of a Man* in the Rijksmuseum **(fig 2)**.[10] However, Dirck's fashionable attire would seem to indicate a slightly later date for this portrait. In particular, the style of the sleeves of his doublet, which allow for much of his blousy shirt to show through, is consistent with men's fashion of the early 1650s.[11]

Portrait of Dirck van Beresteyn is the smallest known work by Dou. The miniature scale implies a sentimental connection between the subject and the viewer, a scale the viewer experiences in the intimacy of one's hands. Baer suggests that the portrait might have been commissioned on the occasion of Dirck's extended absence from the family home in Delft upon his matriculation at Leiden University in 1647.[12] The possibility of a slightly later dating, based on his dress, leads to another, perhaps more

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Reverse of GD-111



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *Portrait of a Man ('Johan Wittert van der Aa')*, 1646, oil on panel, 28 x 24 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-686



Fig 3. Caspar Netscher, *Presentation of a Medallion Portrait*, ca. 1658–60, oil on canvas, 62 x 67.5 cm, Szépmüveszéti Muzeum, Budapest, no. 250

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compelling, possibility. Because of its unusually small format, it is conceivable that the portrait was commissioned by Dirck as a gift for his wife, either for their betrothal or as a token of his love around the time of their marriage in 1652. Such small portrait gifts presented at a marriage proposal were not uncommon. This tradition is recorded in a painting by Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84), *Presentation of a Medallion Portrait* **(fig 3)**, ca. 1658–60, in the Szépmüveszéti Muzeum, Budapest, which portrays a young suitor offering a small portrait medallion to his beloved.[13]

In addition to its diminutive size, the present portrait is also the only known work by the artist painted on a metal support, which laboratory testing has indicated to be an unusual alloy of silver and copper.[14] Its uncommon metallurgical content has raised the possibility that the plate was adopted from a prior use and reappointed here as the smooth, stable support of a painting. One compelling proposition, which accounts for both the size and oval shape of the plate yet warrants further consideration and study, is that it was originally fashioned as a hand-mirror or component of a locket.[15] Aside from its distinctive historical and technical qualities, this diminutive painting is of great significance to the present collector, as it was the first Dutch painting he acquired, and served as the springboard for assembling this remarkable collection of paintings by Gerrit Dou and his contemporaries.

- Dominique Surh, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Ronni Baer notes that none of Dou's sitters have been definitively identified, although early sources indicate that he painted portraits of Spiering and his family, Jurgen Ovens, the Burgomaster Tulp, Abraham de Pape, and Johan Wittert van der Aa and his wife. See Ronni Baer, "Dou and the Delft Connection: The Portrait of Dirk van Beresteyn," in *Face Book: Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th–18th Centuries Liber Amicorium Presented to Rudolf E.O. Ekkart on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday,* ed. Edwin Buijsen, Charles Dumas, and Volker Manuth (Leiden, 2012), 279.
2. Executed in a script that is difficult to date, the inscription was probably added by a descendant in order to preserve information passed down by oral tradition. The inscription identifies the sitter and records his birth and death dates: "G. Dou. fecit. / Dirck Van / Berestein Corn.z / Geboren / 1627 / Overleden 1653." Also on the verso of the painting, but written in a rectangular box, is: "VAN BERESTEYN / van Stolkweg 8 / DEN HAAG," presumably the name and address of the owner at that time. The inscription must predate the appearance of the painting in a Paris sale in 1866, where the sitter's identity was noted in the auction catalogue. See Herman de Kat van Oost- en West-Barendrecht's sale in Paris, Lamme and Petit, 2 May 1866, no. 24. The earliest record of the inscription dates from 1941, when the painting was reproduced in the published genealogy of the Beresteyn family. See Eltjo Aldegondus van Beresteyn, *Genealogie van het Geslacht van Beresteyn*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1941), 1: 262–64; 2: 72–74, fig. 51, no. 145. This distant relative of the sitter had acquired the painting at an auction in Amsterdam in 1919.
3. Dirck van Beresteyn's father, Cornelis Paulusz. Van Beresteyn (1586–1638), was Lord of Middelharnis and held many public offices, including a place on the Council of Forty in 1625, alderman 1626–28, and burgomaster of Delft in 1632, 1635, and 1636. See Eltjo Aldegondus van Beresteyn*, Genealogie van het Geslacht van Beresteyn*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1941), 1: 262–64; 2: 72–74, fig. 51, no. 145.
4. On the idea that *Young Mother* in the Mauritshuis might have been commissioned to celebrate the wedding of Dirck van Beresteyn to Magdalena van Adrichem, see Ben Broos, *Meesterwerken in het Mauritshuis* (The Hague, 1987), 117; and Ronni Baer, "The Young Mother," in *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, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis) (New Haven and London, 2000–1), 106–7, no. 21. This theory, however, has proven incorrect. For a description of the Van Beresteyn's proper coat of arms, see Ronni Baer, "Dou and the Delft Connection: The Portrait of Dirk van Beresteyn," in *Face Book: Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th–18th Centuries Liber Amicorium Presented to Rudolf E.O. Ekkart on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday,* ed. Edwin Buijsen, Charles Dumas, and Volker Manuth (Leiden, 2012), 284, n. 6.
5. For the notarial references in the Delft archives that foretell Dirck's concern for his mortality, see Eltjo Aldegondus van Beresteyn*, Genealogie van het Geslacht van Beresteyn*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1941), 1:263.
6. Dirck's last visit to the notary occurred on 16 September 1653, a week before he passed away on 23 September. He was buried in the Oude Kerk in Delft on 29 September. See Eltjo Aldegondus van

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Beresteyn*, Genealogie van het Geslacht van Beresteyn*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1941), 1:263.

7. Dirck's son would only live for five hours. See Eltjo Aldegondus van Beresteyn*, Genealogie van het Geslacht van Beresteyn.* 3 vols. (The Hague, 1941), 1: 263.
8. Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy*: *Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 102.
9. For a discussion of Dou's use of the blue pigment smalt, see the unpublished report by John Twilley "Scientific Examination of the *Portrait of Dirck van Beresteyn* by Gerrit Dou (GD-111)," dated 23 February 2012, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection, New York. See also Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in The Leiden Collection," *JHNA* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014): n. 12.
10. Ronni Baer, "Dou and the Delft Connection: The Portrait of Dirk van Beresteyn," in *Face Book: Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th–18th Centuries Liber Amicorium Presented to Rudolf E.O. Ekkart on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday,* ed. Edwin Buijsen, Charles Dumas, and Volker Manuth (Leiden, 2012), 279.
11. I am grateful to Marieke de Winkel, who suggested that the portrait was executed between 1650 and 1653 based on the features of the sitter's costume (personal communication, September 2013, correspondence kept on file, The Leiden Collection, New York).
12. Ronni Baer, "Dou and the Delft Connection: The Portrait of Dirk van Beresteyn," in *Face Book: Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th–18th Centuries Liber Amicorium Presented to Rudolf E.O. Ekkart on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday,* ed. Edwin Buijsen, Charles Dumas, and Volker Manuth (Leiden, 2012), 281–83.
13. Peter Sutton, ed., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Exh. cat. Philadelphia Museum of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussicher Kulturbesitz) (Philadelphia, 1984), 275–76, no. 85; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Ghent, 2002), 54–55, 172–73, no. 8; and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Caspar Netscher, *Presentation of a Medallion Portrait*," in *Rembrandt and the Golden Age of Dutch Painting*, ed. Ildikó Ember (Exh. cat. Szépművészeti Muzeum, Budapest) (Budapest, 2014), 464–65. I would like to thank Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. for sharing this essay and suggesting the interpretation presented here.
14. Metallographic study and quantitative analysis show that the alloy consists of 80% silver and 19% copper with minor trace elements making up the balance, thus resulting in a considerable increase in hardness and stiffness relative to silver in purer form. See the unpublished report by John Twilley, "Scientific Examination of the *Portrait of Dirck van Beresteyn* by Gerrit Dou (GD-111), Addendum," dated 13 April 2014, curatorial files, the Leiden Collection, New York.
15. John Twilley suggests that the size, shape, and material of the support could account for its adaptation from some prior use, perhaps in decorative art. Inquiry into the history of silver standards in the period continues (personal communication, September 2013, correspondence kept on file, The Leiden

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Collection, New York).

Provenance

- Herman de Kat van Oost- en West-Barendrecht, Dordrecht, by 1854 (his sale, Paris, Lamme and Petit, 2 May 1866, no. 24, for 170 francs).
- M*** Collection (sale, Paris, Hotel Drouot, 1 February 1875, no. 22).
- Mrs. U.M. Kneppelhout-van Braam Egbert de Langen and Count Bottaro Costa (sale, Amsterdam, Frederik Műller, 16 December 1919, no. 19).
- Dr. E.A. van Beresteyn, The Hague; by descent to his wife Mrs. Van Beresteyn Vierhouten, by 1952 (sale, Christie's, London, 17 April 2002, no. 43 [to van Haeften, Ltd. and Otto Naumann Ltd.).
- [Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd., London and Otto Naumann Ltd., New York (through Derek Johns Ltd., London).]
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2003.

Exhibition History

- The Hague, Gemeentemuseum, "Oude Kunst uit Haagse Bezit," 12 December 1936–31 January 1937, no. 63 [lent by E.A. van Beresteyn].
- Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum, "Drie Eeuwen Portret in Nederland 1500–1800," 29 June–5 October 1952, no. 31 [lent by Mrs. E.A. van Beresteyn].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, December 2009–January 2011 [lent by the present owner].
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Dutch Treat," 11 October 2011–6 January 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Leiden, Museum De Lakenhal, "Gerrit Dou: The Leiden Collection from New York," 9 March–31 August 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, "Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries," 12 October 2014–4 January 2015, no. 10 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present

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owner].

- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H’ART Museum, “From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, “Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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Technical Summary

The support for the painting is an oval metal plate. Unlike the typical copper plates used for painting, this plate is a silver/copper alloy.[1] The reason for this unusual support is unknown, but Dou may have repurposed some other object.[2]

A thin, light-colored ground is visible in the edges of a loss. Dou applied the paint smoothly using delicate modeling to create intricate details in the sitter’s likeness and attire. Infrared photography indicates a slight

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compositional change in the sitter's hair, which was originally longer.[3]

The panel remains in plane, but the reverse exhibits two layers of corrosion: a lower, light brown one covering the entire surface; and an upper, mottled, dark brown one. There is an inscription on the reverse of the panel which identifies the sitter as well as the years of his birth and death. Two layers of corrosion are present under this inscription, indicating a fair amount of time passed between the creation of the panel and the application of the inscription.

The painting is in good condition, and it was last treated in 2002. At that time, two large areas of paint loss were inpainted. A circular loss, 2 cm in diameter, is located above the sitter's proper left hand, and a 2.6 cm long, vertical, rectangular loss is located in the blue background in the middle of the left edge. Pinpoint losses are also located throughout the composition, but are most noticeable in the sitter's face. These look dark and appear to be related to the problem of metal–fatty acid soap formation.[4]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. John Twilley, scientific examination report, 23 February 2012, and addendum, 13 April 2014.
2. John Twilley, scientific examination report, 23 February 2012, and addendum, 13 April 2014.
3. Infrared photographs were taken at 780, 850, and 1000 nm.
4. John Twilley, scientific examination report, 23 February 2012.

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