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Self-Portrait

Govaert Flinck
(Kleve 1615 – 1660 Amsterdam)

1643
oil on panel
73.1 x 53.5 cm
signed and dated in brown paint along left side of narrow horizontally oriented lower plank: "G.flinck.f.1643"
GF-103

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With a posture and expression that exude status and youthful self-confidence, Govaert Flinck painted himself in 1643, at age twenty-eight, facing slightly to the right with his right arm leaning on a brown ledge and his eyes directed straight at the viewer. He wears a gold-trimmed velvet mantle over a low-cut jerkin, and a white, high-collared vest whose frilled edges are visible below his neck and at his wrist. His shoulder-length, ginger-colored hair flows out from under his velvet beret. Around his neck, partially concealed by his mantle, hangs a chain.

Flinck's assuredness of execution is comparable to that of his appearance. He modeled the face with bold, patchy brushstrokes, while accenting his proper right cheek and the rim of his nose with pink highlights. He provided a warm, rich tone for the hair, the moustache, and the area around his proper left eye by allowing the ocher-colored ground to remain exposed. Flinck executed the brocaded trim of his mantle with bravura, generously dappling the upper right shoulder with yellow and white highlights, while merely outlining the shaded areas of trim in yellow, with only an occasional additional highlight **(fig 1)**.

At the time Flinck executed this painting, he had been an independent artist for about eight years and already had enjoyed considerable success as a portrait painter in Amsterdam. In contrast to Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), with whom he had studied around 1634–35, Flinck painted only two autonomous self-portraits in his career: this one and one dated 1639 in the National Gallery, London.[1] He also drew his self-portrait in 1643 **(fig 2)**.[2] As scholars have frequently noted, Flinck based his compelling 1643 *Self-Portrait* on two of Rembrandt's self-portraits: his etched *Self-Portrait Leaning on a Stone Sill* of 1639 **(fig 3)** and his painted 1640 *Self-Portrait at the Age of 34* at the National Gallery, London **(fig 4)**.[3] Rembrandt's iconic and highly innovative self-portraits, which also inspired several self-portraits by other Rembrandt students, show him leaning on a wall with one arm and looking directly at the viewer.[4] In creating these works, Rembrandt drew inspiration from Raphael's *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione* of ca. 1514–15 and Titian's *Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo* of ca. 1510, both of which were in Amsterdam in 1639 in the collection of Alfonzo Lopez.[5] Nevertheless, in each instance, Rembrandt portrayed himself in fanciful early sixteenth-century Northern European fashion, known to him through the prints by Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533) and Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), among others.[6] Rembrandt thus firmly placed himself in a tradition of great local and international artists. As a newly established painter, Flinck was no doubt drawn to his master's models for their bold self-representation.

Flinck based the diagonal slant of his beret on Rembrandt's etched self-portrait, but, following Rembrandt's painting, he positioned himself facing right. As in the master's

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Detail of Govaert Flinck, GF-103, showing the brocade and collar



Fig 2. Govaert Flinck, *Self-Portrait in Uniform*, 1643, black chalk and gray wash on paper, 255 x 180 mm, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik und Kunstsammlungen, Weimar, inv. KK 4947



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait Leaning on a Stone Sill*, 1639, etching, 200 x 164 mm, British Museum, London, Malcolm Collection, inv. PD 1895-9-15-411, © Trustees of the British Museum

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self-portraits, Flinck portrayed himself wearing a shirt with conspicuous frills and a jerkin, both which reflect early sixteenth-century fashion.[7] Unlike Rembrandt, however, he did not depict himself wearing a cross hanging from the gold chain around his neck. Such a cross would have been anathema to Flinck who, in the early 1640s, had important contacts among the Amsterdam Anabaptist elite. He would later become a member of the Remonstrant community.[8]

When the painting was auctioned at Christie's in London in 1943, it was presented with a presumed pendant, which was separated after the auction, and emerged from a private Munich collection in 2015 **(fig 5)**.[9] The pair was attributed to Rembrandt, one thought to be a self-portrait and the other a portrait of his wife, Saskia.[10] After the 1943 auction, Flinck's signature was discovered on the present painting during a conservation treatment, and in 1953 it was exhibited in London as a *Portrait of Rembrandt* by Flinck.[11] In 1980 Bas Dudok van Heel recognized Flinck's likeness by comparing the image to the artist's self-portrait in his 1648 group portrait *Civic Guardsmen of the Company of Captain Joan Huydecoper and Lieutenant Frans van Waveren*.[12] He also identified the female sitter in the presumed pendant as Flinck's wife, Ingetje Thovelingh (ca. 1620–51), whom the artist married in 1645. Since the female portrait is no longer considered to be an intended pendant of the present painting, the identification of Flinck's wife no longer seems plausible.[13]

The painting today looks quite different than it did in 1985, when it was auctioned at Sotheby's in London.[14] At that time Flinck's mantle and beret were black. When the painting was restored in 1986–87, the uppermost black layer was determined to be a later addition and it was removed, leaving the burgundy undermodeling over a freely executed black sketch that is visible today.[15] Subsequently, when Dutch conservator Peter Hermesdorf examined the painting in 1988, he concluded that the mantle and beret were "unfinished."[16] However, since the brocade, which lies on top of the mantle, is quite finished in appearance, and since traces of black paint are visible under the brocade, it seems unlikely that the painting is unfinished. This conclusion is further reinforced by the finished state of the face and hair. Hence, it is quite likely that the mantle and beret were originally black, and that this paint layer was removed at some earlier date.[17]

Many questions also surround the character of the painting's panel support, which consists of four planks of Baltic oak, three vertically grained planks and one horizontally grained plank across the bottom of the painting **(fig 6)**. A fundamental question, which has not been satisfactorily resolved, is whether the bottom, horizontal plank, which extends the parapet on which the sitter's arm rests, was original to Flinck's composition or added later. A copy of the painting, which was with the London art dealer Ronald Cook in the mid-1970s, and which depicts the sitter with a



Fig 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait at Age 34*, 1640, oil on canvas, 102 x 80 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG672, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY



Fig 5. Govaert Flinck, *Portrait of a Woman (Ingetje Thovelingh?)*, ca. 1645, oil on panel, 71 x 52 cm, formerly private collection, Munich



Fig 6. X-radiograph of GF-103

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black beret and black mantle, does not include this lower portion of the painting (**fig 7**).[18] This fact, along with some technical evidence, seems to suggest that the horizontal plank was not part of the original panel construction.[19] On the other hand, the signature and date, which are on this lower portion of the painting, appear to be old and are consistent with those on Flinck's 1643 drawing *Self-Portrait in Uniform* (see (**fig 2**)).

Another question about the panel support concerns its arched top. The copy of the painting has a rectangular format, which was also the original format of the Rembrandt self-portraits that inspired Flinck when making this work.[20] Hence, it seems probable that the arched top was a later revision to the painting. At the time the painting's shape was changed, the background was apparently overpainted.[21] The current greenish layer, which covers a more freely brushed background paint, extends over the curved upper edge of the panel.[22]

Regardless of the painting's complex and confusing display of various paint stages and later additions, the areas around Flinck's face, shirt, and brocaded trim demonstrate his impressive abilities as an artist. Moreover, the lush, fluid undermodeling in the beret and mantle provide a unique insight into his painting practice.



Fig 7. After Govaert Flinck, *Self-Portrait of Govaert Flinck*, unknown date, oil on panel, 69.8 x 52 cm, formerly with Ronald Cook, London, 1975 (photo: taken from an RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) photo mount)

- Ilona van Tuinen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. *Self-Portrait Aged 24*, 1639, oil on panel, 65.8 x 54.4 cm, signed and dated, bottom right, "G. Flinck 1639," National Gallery of Art, London, inv. NG4068.
2. See Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–92), 4: 1896–97, no. 867.
3. This observation has already been made in Horst Gerson, *Rembrandt's Influence in the Seventeenth Century: Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition* (Exh. cat. London, Matthiesen Gallery) (London, 1953), 32, no. 33. See also David Bomford, ed. *Rembrandt: Art in the Making* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery of Art) (London, 1988), 82.
4. For a *Self-Portrait* by Ferdinand Bol in The Leiden Collection inspired after these same Rembrandt compositions, see FB-107.
5. Titian, *Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo*, ca. 1510, oil on canvas, 81.2 x 66.3 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. NG1944 (thought in Rembrandt's time to be a portrait of the poet Lodovico Ariosto). Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, ca. 1514–15, oil on canvas, 82 x 67 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 611. See Peter Schatborn, "Rembrandt: Self-Portrait Leaning on a Stone Wall," in *Rembrandt by Himself*, ed. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery of Art) (Zwolle, 1999–2000), 170–72, no. 53.
6. For an in-depth discussion of the clothing in Rembrandt's 1639 and 1640 self-portraits, see Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), esp. 175–79.
7. See Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 176: this type of jerkin was called a *paltrock*; the smockwork and frills at the neck of the shirt were typical of fashion during the first thirty years of the sixteenth century.
8. For Flinck's Anabaptist clients and his own joining of the Remonstrant community in 1651, the year in which his wife died, see the artist's biography in this catalogue. For the discussion of chains in Rembrandt's self-portraits, see Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 168–69. De Winkel notes that chains worn around the shoulders were part of the "historicizing costume that was based on fashionable dress at the beginning of the sixteenth century."
9. See the auction catalogue of Sotheby's London, 9 December 2015, no. 31. The female portrait was exhibited in 1992, when it was with a private Swedish collector. See Bo Lundström, "Govert Flinck: Dam i fantasidräkt," in *Rembrandt och hans tid*, ed. Görel Cavalli-Björkman (Exh. cat. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum) (Stockholm, 1992), 258, no. 87.
10. See the auction catalogue of Christie's London, 16 July 1943, nos. 106–7.

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11. See the note provided by Noortman Master Paintings, on file at the Leiden Collection, in which they mention a restoration after the 1943 auction. It is not known where and by whom this restoration took place, but it must have taken place between 1943 and 1953, the year in which the painting was exhibited as being by Flinck. See Horst Gerson, *Rembrandt's Influence in the Seventeenth Century: Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition* (Exh. cat. London, Matthiesen Gallery) (London, 1953), no. 33.

12. *Civic Guardsmen of the Company of Captain Joan Huydecoper and Lieutenant Frans van Waveren*, 1648, oil on canvas, 265 x 513 cm, Amsterdam Museum, inv. no. SA 7318. See S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, "Enkele portretten à l'antique door Rembrandt, Bol, Flinck en Backer," *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 32 (1980): 216 n. 7.

13. See the discussion in the auction catalogue of Sotheby's London, 9 December 2015, no. 31.

14. See the sales catalogue, Sotheby's, London, 11 December 1985, no. 62.

15. The painting was acquired by Colnaghi at a sale at Sotheby's, London, on 11 December 1985, no. 62. At the time of the auction, the mantle and beret were still black. In early 1987, while the painting was with Colnaghi, it was restored by Robert Shepherd, who noted that the black paint extended over areas of paint loss and was soluble. Toward the end of the restoration, conservation scientist Nicholas Eastaugh was called in to examine the painting to take selective paint samples. My thanks to Tim Warner Johnson at Colnaghi for forwarding to me, in November 2011, Eastaugh's report, dated 10 February 1987; to Simon Howell at RMS Shepherd Associates (Shepherd Conservation Ltd.) in Wimbledon for sending me Robert Shepherd's full report, dated 31 July 1986, along with an X-radiograph, infrared image, and three photographs taken before and after cleaning; and to Nicholas Eastaugh for communicating his thoughts in November 2011. Both reports and the photographs are on file at the Leiden Collection.

16. Thanks to Eddy Schavemaker, e-mail correspondence in November 2011, for informing me that the painting had been examined by Hermesdorf in 1988 while with Noortman Old Master Paintings. Thanks to Tom van der Molen for consulting Hermesdorf's (incomplete) restoration report at the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History), and for making note of Hermesdorf's letter to Noortman, dated 23 December 1988, stating: "Het bijzondere van dit schilderij is, dat het niet voltooid werd, met name in de mantel en de baret."

17. It is not possible to determine when this black layer was removed, although certainly prior to its restoration in 1986–87 (see note 13). Another possibility is that some or all of the black paint that was removed in 1986–87 was, in fact, original.

18. This copy after Flinck's *Self-Portrait* was with the London art dealer Ronald Cook in 1975. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 6:3608, wrote in his "Corrigenda et Addenda" that the present *Self-Portrait* was with art dealer Bruno Meissner in Zurich after the 1985 auction at Sotheby's, where, during a very careful restoration, all the paint came off the panel. Sumowski suggested that the painting was a nineteenth-century copy and that the original is still missing. Sumowski most likely confused the present painting with the Cook painting, as the Leiden Collection *Self-Portrait* was never with Bruno Meissner. Some years earlier, Sumowski had listed the Cook copy in his discussion of the *Self-Portrait*, and described it as having a straight top. See Sumowski,

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2: 1035, no. 680, 1112. See also Ariane van Suchtelen, "Govert Flinck: Self-Portrait Aged 24," in *Rembrandt by Himself*, ed. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery of Art; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle, 1999–2001), 254 n. 310, who adopts Sumowski's suggestion that Flinck's original *Self-Portrait* was destroyed.

19. See the reports by Robert Shepherd, dated 31 July 1986, and Nicholas Eastaugh, dated 10 February 1987, on file at The Leiden Collection. Eastaugh noted that the pigment samples taken from the horizontal plank were inconsistent with those taken from the rest of the painting. It is, however, not clear whether later retouching plays a role in these results. See also the Technical Summary for this work, in which Annette Rupprecht notes that the paint of the sleeve that extends onto the horizontal panel demonstrates a different kind of transparency in the infrared than the paint above the join. Dendrochronological analysis of the painting has not clarified this problem. The painting was researched by Peter Klein, report dated 16 September 1988, and by Ian Tyers, report dated November 2012, copies of which are on file at The Leiden Collection. Both Klein and Tyers dated the youngest year ring of the middle plank of the three vertical boards of the main panel to 1627. Tyers did not analyze the bottom strip due to the horizontal grain (too few year rings). Based on the signature and date, Klein suggested that the bottom part was added within at most five years of 1643.

20. For a discussion of the change in format of the canvas with Rembrandt's 1640 self-portrait from rectangular to arched, see David Bomford, ed., "Rembrandt: Self-Portrait at the Age of 34," in *Rembrandt: Art in the Making* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery) (London, 1988), 82.

21. According to the report of conservation scientist Nicholas Eastaugh, dated 10 February 1987, on file at The Leiden Collection. Eastaugh writes that the upper layer is definitely not original since it is "continuous with various alterations such as the black areas, but the lower layer appears to be early." Eastaugh also writes that the ruff and shirt frill "extend […] over clear areas of paint loss" and concluded that these areas are not original. Annette Rupprecht, however, did not find any evidence of this during visual examination of the ruff under magnification and under UV light. Indeed, the handling of the paint in the areas of white, for example, the shirt, appears to be entirely comparable to the handling of the paint in the undoubtedly original areas of the face and hair.

22. John Twilley, independent conservation scientist in Hawthorne, New York, noted that the edges of the upper part of the panel are jagged. He also noted the curved lines above and to the right of Flinck's head, which extend to the upper edge of the panel and suggest that the format may in fact once have been taller. See the notes dated 1 December 2011 by the present author of a meeting held at the Leiden Collection on 18 November 2011, kept on file at the Leiden Collection, and the X-radiograph. See also the Technical Summary by Annette Rupprecht, who notes that it is unclear whether these curved lines were made in the ground or the lower paint layers. The lines, which appear to have been applied with a blunt object or a finger, do not correspond to any elements in the background in its current state.

Provenance

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- Sir Berkeley Digby George Sheffield (1876–1946), 6th Baronet, Nomanby Hall, Flixborough, Lincolnshire (sale, Christie's, London, 16 July 1943, no. 106, as a *Self-Portrait* by Rembrandt [to Edward Speelman, London for £315]).
- Sir Charles Clore (1904–79), London (his sale, Sotheby's, London, 11 December 1985, no. 62 [to Colnaghi, London; Noortman Gallery, Maastricht and London, 1988]).
- Private collection, The Netherlands [Noortman Gallery, Maastricht and London, 2007].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Exhibition History

- London, Matthiesen Gallery, "Rembrandt's Influence in the 17th Century," 20 February–2 April 1953, no. 33 [lent by a private collector (Sir Charles Clore?)].
- Charlottesville, The University of Virginia, The Fralin Museum of Art, "A Portrait of the Artist, 1525–1825," 30 January–7 June 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Kleve, Museum Kurhaus Kleve, "Govert Flinck–Reflecting History," 4 October 2015–17 January 2016, no. 12 [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 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].
- 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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93. Exh. cat. Kleve, Museum Kurhaus Kleve. Kleve, 2015.

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Technical Summary

The support is a composite panel composed of four planks of Baltic oak: three vertically grained and vertically oriented planks that form a rectangular shape with an arched upper edge and one narrow horizontally grained and horizontally oriented rectangular plank attached to the lower edges of the three vertical planks.[1] Fine diagonal tool marks along the composite panel reverse indicate it was thinned prior to being cradled. Traces of a horizontal bevel remain along the lower edge of the outer two vertical planks, where they join the horizontal plank. There is one label but no wax collection seals, import stamps, stencils, or panel maker's marks.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. A series of semicircular arched shapes inscribed into the ground or lower paint layers above and to the right of the figure's head do not relate to the plain green background.

During a 1987 restoration treatment in London, the black paint along the figure's jacket and cap was found to be soluble and removed. A red transparent underlayer, applied with loose brushwork in a sketchy manner

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allowing the light-colored ground to show through, was revealed. In contrast, the figure's face is executed with opaque paint with a high level of finish, and areas of detail along the brocade border of the jacket's edge have been applied in low impasto.

In 1988, scientific analysis of the green paint along the plain background determined it was restoration. Additional analysis of paint cross-sections taken from the horizontally oriented lower plank, which bears a "G.flinck.f.1643" signature and date in brown paint along the left side, suggested the paint was not a part of the original structure of the painting. Dendrochronology undertaken at the time concluded the earliest use date of the central vertical plank is 1638 and a more plausible first use date is 1642. It was reasoned that since the lower horizontal plank bears the signature and a 1643 date, the lower plank was either part of the original composite panel or applied at most five years later.[2]

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. The images reveal that the red paint along the elbow and sleeve on the narrow horizontally oriented lower plank does not have the same transparency as the red paint along the sleeve on the vertically oriented plank above the panel join. In the X-radiograph, the figure's proper left arm appears to have been shifted closer to the torso during the paint stage.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2007. The painting is in a good state of preservation. It is presented with a combination of exposed underlayers and restoration, and may be an unfinished work.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The identification of wood is based on dendrochronology reports by Peter Klein, dated 16 September 1988, and Ian Tyers, dated November 2012.
2. According to the GF-103 technical report by Nicholas Eastaugh, dated 10 February 1987, and Peter Klein's dendrochronology report of 1988.

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