



Self-Portrait, Behind a Parapet

Ferdinand Bol
(Dordrecht 1616 – 1680 Amsterdam)

1648

oil on canvas

85.5 x 71 cm

signed and dated in dark paint, on sheet of paper
along lower right: "Bol. fecit 1648"

FB-107



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Seated behind a parapet, his right arm resting with assured elegance on a richly patterned pillow, Ferdinand Bol commands the gaze of the viewer in this refined and fanciful self-portrait.^[1] Bol portrayed himself in the foreground of the picture plane in a three-quarter-length pose, wearing a deep red and gold-trimmed velvet cloak, thick gold chains and medallion, and a black beret topped with a long arched feather. He exudes confidence and grace, and a bit of youthful arrogance. Bol's signature and the date of 1648 can be read on the paper he holds gingerly near the edge of the parapet.^[2] Against the muted brown background, strong contrasts of light and dark model his dignified form and reveal the varied textures of the fabric, particularly the sheen of the gold thread on his red cloak. His face is distinguished by a small moustache and goatee, while the brown curls of his hair reach his shoulders.

Bol executed this painting at the age of thirty-two, and though he already enjoyed a prosperous career in Amsterdam, the portrait's heightened splendor and historicizing costume belonged to an imagined artistic and gentlemanly persona rather than to a contemporary reality.^[3] For this inventive mode of self-representation, Bol turned to Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) as his source of inspiration. Scholars have long noted how Bol modeled this image, as well as a number of his other self-portraits and *tronies* from the mid- to late 1640s, on Rembrandt's 1640 *Self-Portrait at the Age of 34* in the National Gallery, London (**fig 1**).^[4] Following Rembrandt's model, Bol has here situated himself behind a balustrade, with his right arm protruding ever so slightly into the viewer's space. His varied brushwork and use of chiaroscuro to create rich tonal contrasts also derive from Rembrandt's prototype.^[5] Bol's costume was similarly imaginative, combining, as it does, sixteenth-century elements, such as the doublet and beret, and contemporary elements such as the red cloak.^[6]

Rembrandt's London *Self-Portrait* was an assertive statement of his aspirations and capabilities as an artist.^[7] It evoked his status and success, as well as his Italian sources of inspiration: Raphael's *Portrait of Castiglione* and Titian's *Portrait of a Man*.^[8] Bol would have been well aware of these associations, and by basing his self-portrait on Rembrandt's example, he positioned himself as a protégé of his master and within the framework of his great Renaissance predecessors. While it is impossible to consider *Self-Portrait, Behind a Parapet* without Rembrandt's precedent, the sophistication of this image demonstrated Bol's keen interest in self-representation and willingness to assert his own artistic identity.^[9]

Bol both departed from and fused together Rembrandt's models in creating this self-portrait. Large gold chains—a mark of the nobility of the painter's profession—lie imposingly across his chest.^[10] Considering that Bol was never granted a gold chain, the inclusion of them here demonstrates his self-assurance about his abilities as a

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait at the Age of 34*, 1640, oil on canvas, 102 x 80 cm, National Gallery, London, NG672, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY



Fig 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait Aged 23*, 1629, oil on wood, 89.7 x 73.5 cm, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, P21n6



Fig 3. Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, 1646, oil on canvas, 102 x 85.5 cm, Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht

painter.^[11] In this regard, Bol's personality may have been similar to Rembrandt's youthful sense of self as evident in his 1629 *Self-Portrait Aged 23* at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (**fig 2**).^[12] This painting, created when Rembrandt was still in Leiden, shows the young artist similarly wearing a gold chain, although, like Bol, he was never given one by a wealthy or noble patron.

Bol was deeply invested in self-portraiture in the second half of the 1640s.^[13] In his earliest dated *Self-Portrait* from 1646, he depicted himself wearing a black beret, a gold-trimmed red cloak, and a thin gold chain around his neck (**fig 3**).^[14] He also extended his right gloved hand toward the viewer in a rhetorical gesture that activates the pictorial space. Bol further modified this portrait type in his *Self-Portrait* in Springfield, dated one year later. In this work, he portrayed himself behind a balustrade within a stone archway while pushing aside a gold-colored curtain.^[15] Bol appears noticeably older in the Dordrecht and Springfield works, and his facial features have changed, including a wider nose and chin and thicker moustache and goatee. These differences in physiognomy have led scholars to question the identity of the sitter in this group of self-portraits, yet they all seem to represent the artist.^[16] The Leiden Collection *Self-Portrait* stands out in this group in its blending of portraiture and fantasy, while sumptuously displaying Bol's pictorial acumen.^[17] For all these reasons, this striking *Self-Portrait* is a fitting capstone to The Leiden Collection's outstanding group of works by Ferdinand Bol, the largest assemblage of his paintings outside of the Hermitage.

- Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 2017

Endnotes

1. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 67, 119, no. 63. There is a known copy of FB-107, executed on panel and oval in shape—one of the few works on panel done by Bol—though its present whereabouts are unknown. It has the same composition as FB-107 with nearly identical measurements, except for slight cropping on its sides. Blankert, following the opinion of Mellaart, believed the work to be good copy by either Bol or a follower. See J. H. J. Mellaart, “Self-Portraits by Bol,” *Burlington Magazine* 43, no. 247 (1923): 154; Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 119, no. 63a. Recent technical investigation has shown that there were triangular shapes in the upper corners of FB-107 previously painted black. These areas were subsequently toned to match the background color during restoration. These changes suggest that FB-107 may originally have been taller, and possibly painted with a shallow arched upper edge in a way similar to Bol's self-portraits in Springfield and London. See Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1647, oil on canvas, 97.4 x 77.8 cm, Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts (see discussion below); Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait with Palette*, ca. 1653, oil on canvas, 105 x 82.5 cm (rounded at top), private collection, London.
2. The date has been previously read as 1643 or 1647.
3. For Bol's early career in Amsterdam, see the artist's biography in this catalogue, and Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 29–39, 56–59.
4. Bol made a drawn copy of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* when he was an assistant in the master's studio (red and black chalk, gray wash, 17.8 x 12.8 cm, Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). The drawing carefully reproduces Rembrandt's image, even its rounded composition. Bol produced at least six similar images in this period. For Bol's series of self-portraits and *tronies*, which are discussed further below, see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), nos. 60–65. While FB-107 relates directly to Rembrandt's 1640 painting, it also broadly reflects Bol's familiarity with the master's *Self-Portrait, Leaning on a Stone Wall*, 1639, etching and drypoint, 20.5 x 16.4 cm. Both painting and etching provided the portrait type that Bol and a number of Rembrandt pupils followed in the 1640s. See, for example, GF-103, and Govert Flinck, *Self-Portrait Aged 24*, 1639, oil on panel, 65.8 x 54.4 cm, National Gallery, London.
5. Notably, Bol did not follow Rembrandt's arched composition in FB-107.
6. Despite the contemporary element of his dress, Bol's costume in FB-107 would have been described as *antyk*, indicating its historicizing character. For example, Bol wears a jerkin, identifiable by its horizontal neckline, over a white doublet, which went out of style by the mid-sixteenth century. The elegant black beret, or bonnet, was also characteristic of sixteenth-century fashion. For this style, Rembrandt was influenced by sixteenth-century prints, including Lucas van Leyden's *Portrait of a Young Man with a Skull*, ca. 1519, engraving, 18.4 x 14.4 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Hieronymous Cock's portrait of *Lucas van Leyden*, 1572, engraving, Rijksprentenkabinet,

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Bol, who may have been familiar with these prints as well, could have also looked to a number of Rembrandt's historicizing self-portrait prints, such as *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, 1636, etching, 10.4 x 9.5 cm, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, or *Self-Portrait in Sixteenth-Century Apparel*, 1638, etching, 13.4 x 10.3 cm, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. For a discussion of costume in Rembrandt's self-portraits, and its interpretations and comparisons to Bol's dress, see Ariane van Suchtelen, "Pupils of Rembrandt," in *Rembrandt by Himself*, ed. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1999), 234–35; Marieke de Winkel, "Costume in Rembrandt's Self Portraits," in *Rembrandt by Himself*, ed. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1999), 67–74; Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 163–89.

7. See H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, 1990), 69, 71–72, 74–76, 81, 87–88, 91, 120, 130–31; Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds., *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1999), no. 54.
8. Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, before 1516, oil on canvas, 82 x 67 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris; Titian, *Portrait of a Man*, ca. 1512, oil on canvas, 81.2 x 66.3 cm, National Gallery, London. For Rembrandt's engagement with these paintings, see Eddy de Jongh, "The Spur of Wit: Rembrandt's Response to an Italian Challenge," *Delta* 12 (1969): 49–67; H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, 1990), 69–78.
9. The derivative nature of Bol's self-portraits is emphasized repeatedly in the scholarship. See, for example, Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 57–58; H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, 1990), 80–81.
10. Bol's gold chains, which form part of his historicizing costume, project a sense of nobility. Although they were probably intended to emphasize the fanciful nature of this portrait, they do, nonetheless, suggest an association with images of courtly artists, such as Titian and Anthony van Dyck, who portrayed themselves wearing the gold chains that had been given to them by their respective sovereigns. See Titian, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1562, oil on canvas, 86 x 65 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, and Anthony van Dyck, *Self-Portrait with Sunflower*, ca. 1635–36, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 73 cm, private collection.
11. Rembrandt portrayed himself wearing a gold chain on numerous occasions; see, for example, fig. 2; *Self-Portrait with Beret and Gold Chain*, ca. 1630–31, oil on panel, 69.7 x 57 cm, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; *Self-Portrait*, 1633, oil on panel, 61 x 48.1 cm (oval), Musée du Louvre, Paris. See Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds., *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1999), nos. 10, 26, 35. In another departure from Rembrandt, who depicted his signature on the wooden balustrade in the London painting, Bol cleverly portrayed his signature on the paper between his hands.

12. For this portrait, see, for example, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Rembrandt Inventing Himself,” in *Rembrandt Creates Rembrandt: Art and Ambition in Leiden, 1629–1631*, ed. Alan Chong (Exh. cat. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) (Boston, 2000), 13–24.
13. Aside from the paintings in Dordrecht and Springfield discussed below, Bol executed two self-portraits that closely followed Rembrandt’s 1639 etching in reverse. Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, 1647, oil on canvas, 101 x 88 cm, Toledo Museum of Art; Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, 1647, oil on canvas, 93 x 83.5 cm, present whereabouts unknown. A work presently in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1647, oil on canvas, 88.6 x 77 cm) has been called a self-portrait or portrait of a young man. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 118–22; nos. 61–62, 65; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 1:305, no. 136.
14. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 58, 64, 66, 118, no. 60; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 1:305, no. 135; Albert Blankert, ed., *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* (Exh. cat. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria; Canberra, National Gallery of Australia) (Zwolle, 1997–98), 248–49, no. 45; Ariane van Suchtelen, “Pupils of Rembrandt,” in *Rembrandt by Himself*, ed. Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1999), 234–36, no. 87.
15. Ferdinand Bol, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1647, oil on canvas, 97.4 x 77.8 cm, Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 119–20, no. 64; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 1:306, no. 138; Albert Blankert, ed., *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* (Exh. cat. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria; Canberra, National Gallery of Australia) (Zwolle, 1997–98), 250–51, no. 46; Alice I. Davies, *16th– and 17th-Century Dutch and Flemish Paintings in the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts* (Springfield, 1993), 26–29, no. 2. Several copies exist of this work; see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 120, nos. 64a, 64b, 64c.
16. The number of self-portraits that Bol produced in the 1640s has long been a subject of debate in the scholarship, sparked by the question of the identity of the sitters. Abraham Bredius and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot first debated the issue at the beginning of the twentieth century, joined soon thereafter by J. H. J. Mellaart. Given the close associations that exist between many of Bol’s portraits and *tronies*—character studies of anonymous individuals often portrayed in fanciful costume like the artist in FB-107—scholars have questioned whether Bol’s images actually represent him. Dagmar Hirschfelder addresses the close relationship and, consequently, the distinctions between *tronie* and portrait in her comprehensive study, *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2008). For her discussion of Bol’s *tronies* specifically, see 136–37, 277–82. For the issue of Bol’s self-portraits, as well as further literature, see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 57–59; Albert Blankert, ed., *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* (Exh. cat. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria; Canberra, National Gallery of



Australia) (Zwolle, 1997–98), 248–50, nos. 45–46.

17. For Bol's late self-portraits from the 1650s and 1660s, see *Self-Portrait with Palette*, 1653, oil on canvas, 105 x 82.5 cm (rounded at top), private collection, London; *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1669, oil on canvas, 128 x 104 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), nos. 66 and 103.