

Pair of Portraits: Elegant Man and Elegant Woman, ca. 1660

Gerard ter Borch the Younger

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Sober in both palette and demeanor, yet steeped in demure charm, these portraits of an unidentified man and woman exemplify the elegant restraint and simplicity of Gerard ter Borch the Younger's small-scale depictions of prosperous citizens of the Dutch Republic. Isolated before a plain dark-green background, the subjects are visible to knee length; their bodies face three-quarters to center, but their heads are turned to look directly toward the viewer. The man is clad in a black doublet and breeches with a cloak of the same color draped over his left shoulder and wrapped tightly around his middle. The black of his costume and tall "sugarloaf" hat is relieved only by a plain collar of white linen and the tan gloves—with a flash of red lining just barely visible—he grasps loosely in his right hand. The woman's attire is equally plain: a black gown with a voluminous overskirt tucked up to thigh level. Her sleeve cuffs and broad shoulder kerchief are made of sheer white linen; the cuffs and her underlying chemise are both discreetly trimmed with narrow bands of lace. Personal ornaments are few and modest: a folding fan, a ring, gold earbobs with dangling pearls, and a band of silver lace to edge the crown of her black cap.

Ter Borch's small-scale portraits cleverly adapted the tradition of grand, full-length state portraits to suit the more modest republican tastes of the Dutch bourgeoisie. *Elegant Man* and *Elegant Woman* are typical of those Ter Borch painted for members of Deventer's political elite around 1660 or slightly later. Most show the sitter at full length, standing stiffly erect before a strikingly spare background furnished (if at all) with just a simple table or chair. Poses are often repeated from one painting to another, either exactly or with trifling variations, such as in the positioning of the hands or in the accessories included. *Elegant Man*, for example, is virtually identical in pose and costume to the full-length *Portrait of a Man* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich **(fig 1)**, while *Elegant Woman* can be compared to the *Portrait of Johanna Quadacker* (private collection) or the *Portrait of an Older Woman* in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen **(fig 2)**.[1] As Kettering has noted, this uniformity was both intentional and desirable among the close-knit community of Deventer's elite, who felt a particularly strong sense of civic identity: Ter Borch's portraits "were designed to reveal a collective identity for sitters whose status within the group . . . mattered nearly as much as their own individuality."[2]

Gudlaugsson is of the opinion that these pendant paintings were originally larger and probably depicted the sitters at full length, which seems likely.[3] Most of the portraits Ter Borch painted around 1660, including those

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of a Man*, about 1660, oil on canvas, 66.5 x 49.4 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. 8128, bpk, Berlin / Alte Pinakothek / Art Resource, NY



Fig 2. Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of an Older Woman*, about 1660, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 47 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, inv. 418

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mentioned above that share these poses, show the subject at full length. Technical evidence does not exclude the possibility that the present paintings have been reduced. The canvases have been lined, the edges of the original canvases are irregularly trimmed, and tacking edges have been removed from all four edges of each canvas. X-radiographs show little evidence of cusping along any of the canvas edges, suggesting that they may have been substantially trimmed on all sides.[4] Along the bottom of the woman's portrait is a 5.5 centimeter-wide horizontal band of slightly darker green background paint; this may be a remnant of the horizontal "shadow" Ter Borch often introduced in his full-length portraits to suggest the transition between wall and floor in an otherwise bare and undefined space. No such band is visible in the portrait of the man, but even in pendant portraits, these shadowy transitions are not always precisely aligned between the two paintings, and one may well have been present below the current bottom edge of the canvas.[5]

Numerous pentimenti are found in these works, especially in *Elegant Man*, some of which are visible with the naked eye. Shadowy contours to either side of the man's figure and around the left, top and right sides of his hat suggest that Ter Borch may originally have planned for a somewhat bulkier figure, or that he re-positioned the figure during the painting process. Similar pentimenti along the woman's proper left sleeve and the outer contour of her skirt below the fan suggest that her figure, too, was shifted or modified during the painting process. The paintings are generally in good condition, although *Elegant Woman* contains a patched hole in the canvas (about 3 x 2 cm) just to the left of the sitter's white collar.[6]

- Marjorie E. Wieseman, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2: 166, 177–78 and 181, nos. 158, 175, and 182 respectively.
2. Alison McNeil Kettering, “Gerard ter Borch’s Portraits of the Deventer Elite,” *Simiolis* 27 (1999): 58.
3. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–60), 2: 167, 168.
4. X-rays were taken in 2012 by Jean Neeman and digitized by Yosi Poseilov, both of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. I am grateful to Amy Walsh, curator of European paintings at LACMA, for making these images available to me.
5. As, for example, in the *Portrait of a Man* in Munich (fig. 1) and its pendant *Portrait of a Woman* (inv. 8129), in which the shadowy “transition” is significantly higher in the former than it is in the latter portrait.
6. See the technical report prepared by Annette Rupprecht, March 2012.

Artworks in this Group

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Elegant Man

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

ca. 1660
oil on canvas
46.8 x 36.5 cm
GB-108.a

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Provenance

- (Possibly) Charles-Auguste-Louis-Joseph, Duc de Morny (1811–1865), Paris.[1]
- (Possibly) Charles-Léon Cardon (1850–1920), Brussels. [2]
- [F. Kleinberger Gallery, Paris].
- Frederick B. Pratt (1865–1945), New York, by 1928; by descent until 2006 [Jack Kilgore & Co., New York, 2006].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Provenance Notes

1. According to Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, 8 vols. (London, 1907–27), translated from *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten höllandischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28), 5:100, under no. 320; and 5:123, under no. 400. However, no paintings of this description appear in any of the sales of paintings from the collection of the Duc de Morny held from 1841 to 1868; nor are they mentioned in L. Lagrange, “La Galerie de M. Le Duc de Morny,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 14 (April 1863): 289–306.
2. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, 8 vols. (London, 1907–27), translated from *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten höllandischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28), 5:100, under no. 320; and 5:123, under no. 400. No paintings of this description were included in the exhibition of Cardon’s collection held in Brussels in 1912 (*Exposition de la Miniature* [Exh. cat. Brussels, Palais Goffinet] [Brussels, 1912]), or listed in the posthumous sales of paintings from his collection (sale, Galerie Fievez, Brussels, 27 June 1921 and 13–15 July 1921).

Exhibition History

- Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, 1972–86 [lent by Pratt].
- Norfolk, Virginia, Chrysler Museum of Art, “Dutch Golden Age Paintings,” 22 June 2009–January 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Los Angeles, California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent

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collection, April 2012–July 2014 [lent by the present owner].

References

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- Gudlaugsson, Sturla, J. *Geraert ter Borch*. 2 vols. The Hague, 1959–60, 2: 167–68, nos. 162 and 163.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of fine, plain, closed-weave fabric with tacking margins removed and paper tape along the edges, has been lined. There is a pronounced vertical thread to the figure's left and a restored rectangular area of damage to the left of the figure's white collar.[1] A white priming layer has been applied to the lining reverse, and there are no wax collection seals, stencils, labels or import stamps visible along the lining or stretcher.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The paint has been applied with loose, fluid brushstrokes in thin, smooth glazes with no use of impasto. The figure is silhouetted against a green background that has a slightly darker green, 5.5 cm-high horizontal band across the width of the lower edge. This differs from the similarly sized companion portrait GB-109, *Portrait of A Man*, which has a plain green background without a darker green horizontal band.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional changes visible in the images and as pentimenti include slight shifts to the right side of the figure's head, to her proper left sleeve, and to her skirt below the folded black fan.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2006 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Rectangular damage: 3 cm H x 2 cm W. Pronounced thread: approx. 13.5 cm from the left stretcher edge when measured along the upper edge and 16 cm from the left stretcher edge

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when measured along the lower edge. There is no X-radiograph of this painting that would indicate whether this is a thread anomaly or perhaps a canvas seam.



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Elegant Woman

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(Zwolle 1617 – 1681 Deventer)

ca. 1660
oil on canvas
46.8 x 36.5 cm
GB-108.b

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