

- 1912 "Rembrandt's Woman Plucking": 138.
 1912 Hofstede de Groot: 173–188, 174, 178–181, repro.
 1912 Bode: 504–508, repro.
 1913 Bredius: 273–276.
 1930b Valentiner: 3–84, 4, repro.
 1931 Valentiner: no. 67, pl. 67.
 1965 NGA: 111, no. 1443.
 1968 NGA: 98, no. 1443, repro.
 1975 NGA: 292–293, no. 1443, repro.
 1985 NGA: 335, repro.

1942.9.64 (660)

Follower of Rembrandt van Rijn

Head of an Aged Woman

1655/1660

Oil on oak, 21.1 x 17.5 (8¼ x 6¾)

Widener Collection

Inscriptions

At center left: *Rembrandt/f.1657*

Technical Notes: The support is a single, uncradled oak board with a vertical grain, cut from a tree felled between 1637 and 1643.¹ A vertical split caused a dislevel in the panel at the top edge in the center. A small, 1.3 x 0.5 cm, loss of paint and ground layers occurred there when the wood surface was mechanically planed. The left and right edges appear to have been planed, slightly reducing the panel's horizontal dimensions.

A thin, smooth, white ground layer covering the panel lies under a reddish brown imprimatura layer. This layer, which must have been left as a reserve for the woman's robe, is still visible in that area. Paint was applied freely with very loose brushwork, considerable impasto, and rapid scumbles. Paint was worked wet into wet in rapid succession, with the face painted first, followed by the background. Small losses are found in the dark background at the right and along the edges, and mild abrasion has occurred in the thin, dark passages. The painting was cleaned in 1992. At that time overpaint removed from the dark right background revealed a pentimento in the placement of the woman's shoulder.

Provenance: Probably H. Verschuring, The Hague, by 1751.² Gottfried Winkler, Leipzig, by 1765. Possibly with Stephen Bourgeois, Paris, c. 1893.³ Rodolphe Kann [d. 1905], Paris, by 1898; (Duveen Brothers, London, in 1907);⁴ (F. Kleinberger & Co., Paris, in 1909); Léonardus Nardus [1868–1930], Suresnes, France.⁵ Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, by 1911; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

Exhibited: *Rembrandt: schilderijen bijeengebracht ter gelegenheid van de inbaldiging van Hare Majesteit Koningin Wilhelmina*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1898, no. 100. Washington 1969, no. 8.



Fig. 1. X-radiograph of 1942.9.64

INFORMAL bust-length figure studies, called *tronies* in the seventeenth century, were frequently painted by Rembrandt and members of his workshop.⁶ This small oil sketch of a wizened old woman is a painting of this type. The sitter stares out from under a white headpiece, her black cape fastened at the neck. The woman's creased and wrinkled visage is expressed with dense paints vigorously applied with a stiff brush. At the edge of the strokes are crisp and definite ridges, a characteristic of *alla prima* painting that is also evident in the x-radiograph (fig. 1). This technique is particularly apparent along the decorative pattern at the lower edge of the headpiece, which has been created by pushing a firm object, perhaps even a firm brush, into the wet paint. In contrast to the thick impastos on the face and headpiece, the black cape is thinly painted and summarily indicated. Surprisingly, the background is vigorously painted, particularly in the upper region. The paint in the background around the head is actually thicker than that of the thinly executed black cape.

The attribution of this painting to Rembrandt dates to at least 1765, when it was engraved in reverse



Follower of Rembrandt van Rijn, *Head of an Aged Woman*, 1942.9.64

by J. H. Bause. At that time it was in the Gottfried Winkler Collection in Leipzig.⁷ Nevertheless, despite the expressive character of the image, the attribution seems impossible for stylistic reasons. As Edith Standen implied in her notes on the painting when it was in Widener's collection, the compositional arrangement is rather awkward. She wrote: "Lower part unconvincing; head does not seem to join body, set of shoulders seems wrong...."⁸ As noted in the catalogue of the National Gallery's 1969 exhibition, the painting "differs markedly from the rest of Rembrandt's work, and it has not yet been possible to relate this study to any of his other paintings."⁹ Although the signature and date were questioned verbally by Stechow in 1937,¹⁰ the first author to publish that they were forged was Gerson in 1969.¹¹ Gerson also thought that the painting did not resemble "the style of Rembrandt's authentic oil sketches."

While the signature and date, 1657, differ markedly from Rembrandt's own, there is no technical evidence that they were applied a good deal after the execution of the painting itself. In any event, it would appear that the sketch was executed in the latter half of the 1650s. Dendrochronological examination has established the felling date for the tree from which the panel was made as between 1637 and 1643. Thus one can with some assurance conclude that the work was painted during Rembrandt's lifetime. The large number of such studies that have survived from Rembrandt's workshop indicates that he encouraged his students to learn his manner of painting in this way. Rembrandt's paintings of old women from the mid-1650s, including *An Old Woman in a Hood*, 1654 (Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Br. 383) and *An Old Woman in an Armchair*, 1654 (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg, Br. 381), probably served as models for this work.¹²

The old woman depicted in this painting also appears in a number of works by Abraham van Dijck (1635–1672), in particular his *The Old Prophetess*, c. 1655–1660, now in the Hermitage.¹³ While the harsh angular style of the oil sketch is not characteristic of the more finished works by this artist, it is entirely possible that he could have painted in such a manner when executing a preliminary oil sketch. Until more information is known about the full range of his work, however, it is not possible to offer more than an initial suggestion of this artist, who seems to have studied with Rembrandt in the early 1650s. If the painting were, in fact, executed by Van Dijck, then it almost certainly was painted after he had left Rembrandt's workshop and had begun painting on his own.

Notes

1. Dendrochronology by Dr. Peter Klein, Universität Hamburg, 28 September 1987.

2. Hoet 1752, 2: 482, lists "Een Oud Vrouwtje door Rembrandt. h.9d., br. 8d." The following painting listed was a pendant of an old man. The first of these two paintings is undoubtedly Verschuring's "Oud Vrouwtje," since it had such a pendant when it was in the Winkler Collection in 1765. See note 7.

3. Michel 1893 (1894 English ed.), 238, gives the following description of a painting in the possession of "M. Steph. Bourgeois": "Bust Portrait of a Woman, three-quarter to the front, small size. About 1640. [Wood]. 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches." It is possible that this painting is in fact *Head of an Aged Woman*, and that Rodolphe Kann obtained it from Bourgeois, but so far no direct evidence has come to light that supports this theory.

4. Duveen 1957, 234.

5. HdG 1907–1927, 6: 255, and also provenance card index in NGA curatorial records, list Nardus as a previous owner of the picture, but his name is deleted on the Widener Collection file card for the picture. (Another study of a head that came to the Widener Collection from that of Rodolphe Kann, the *Head of Saint Matthew*, 1942.9.58, was owned by Nardus in the interim.)

6. Several of these appear in the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt's collection. See Strauss and Van der Meulen 1979, 349–388, especially nos. 105, 115, 118, 294.

7. Although the painting is described as being in the Gottfried Winkler Collection in Leipzig, Bause, for some reason, dedicated his print to Johann Jacob Haid of Augsburg. Bause also engraved no. 496 from Winkler's catalogue as a pendant to this work. The description of the latter work is: "Der Kopf eines betagten Mannes, mit dickaufgeschwollener Nase, kurzem Haare und Barte...." This painting has disappeared but is listed in HdG 1907–1927, 6: no. 461. A photograph of Bause's engraving of the old man is in the NGA curatorial files.

8. Manuscript in NGA curatorial files.

9. Washington 1969, no. 18.

10. Notes of Edith Standen (Widener's secretary for art), in NGA curatorial files.

11. Gerson/Bredius 1969, 581, no. 392.

12. An earlier prototype that might also have been influential is Rembrandt's etching *Sick Woman with a Large White Head-dress*, c. 1640–1641 (B. 359).

13. Sumowski 1983, 1: 671, cat. 367. Van Dijck was probably a pupil of Rembrandt's in the early 1650s, although nothing definite is known about the exact period of his apprenticeship. Sumowski dates the Hermitage painting 1655/1660 on the basis of comparisons with Van Dijck's few dated works. The same model appears frequently in his oeuvre: see Sumowski 1983, 1: cats. 370, 372, 375, 377. An oil sketch on panel (23.8 x 20 cm) representing the same model in a similar headpiece was in a private collection in Ontario in 1973 (photograph in NGA curatorial files).

References

- 1768 *Gemaelde Gottfried Winkler*: 499, no. 495.
 1829–1842 Smith, 7 (1836): 182, no. 572.
 1897–1906 Bode, 6 (1901): 26, 176, no. 472, repro.; 8 (1906): 377.
 1899 Bell: 82, 158 (also 1907 rev. ed.: 78, 136).
 1900 Bode: no. 6., repro.

- 1906 Rosenberg: 320, 403, repro. (also 1908 3rd rev. ed.: 440, 563, repro.).
- 1907 *Kann*, 1: iv, 76, no. 75, repro.
- 1907–1928 HdG, 6 (1916): 255, 258, nos. 508, 518.
- 1913–1916 Widener: no. 36, repro.
- 1914 Valentiner: 248, no. 74.
- 1923 Widener: unpaginated, repro.
- 1923 Meldrum: 178, 201, no. 383A.
- 1931 Valentiner: no. 131, repro.
- 1931 Widener: 52–53, repro.
- 1935 Bredius: 17, 392, repro. (also 1936 English ed.: 16, 392, repro.).
- 1942 Widener: 6, no. 660.
- 1948 Widener: 42, repro.
- 1957 Duveen: 234.
- 1959 Widener: 42, no. 660, repro.
- 1963 Walker: 313, 342, repro.
- 1965 NGA: 110, no. 660.
- 1966 Bauch: 15, no. 273, repro.
- 1968 NGA: 98, no. 660, repro.
- 1969 Gerson/Bredius: 301, 581, no. 392, repro.
- 1969 Washington: no. 8.
- 1975 NGA: 288–289, no. 660, repro.
- 1976 Fowles: 52, 205.
- 1985 NGA: 334, repro.

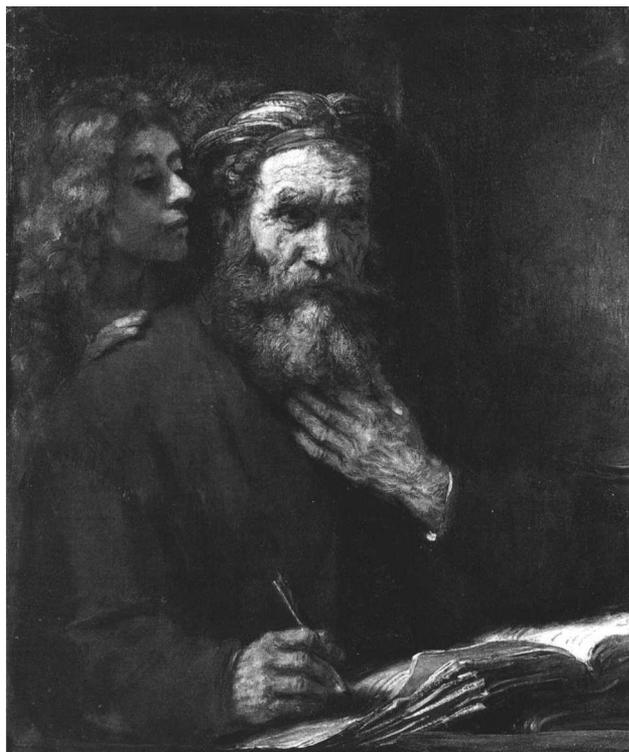


Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, 1661, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre, © Photo R.M.N.

1942.9.58 (654)

Follower of Rembrandt van Rijn

Head of Saint Matthew

date uncertain

Oil on oak, 25 x 19.5 (9 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$)

Widener Collection

Technical Notes: The support is a vertically grained, thin, oak panel beveled on the back on all sides. It is not quarter sawn, resulting in an irregular grain pattern, and contains no sapwood, precluding the dating of the panel by dendrochronology.¹ Paint is applied over a granular gray priming in an impasted paint in the head and in thin glazes in the background, with many areas worked wet into wet. Pigment analysis indicates that the paints are consistent with those found in seventeenth-century studio practice.² The painting, which is in excellent condition, was restored in 1994.

Provenance: Alfred Buckley, New Hall, England, by 1882.³ Rodolphe Kann [d. 1905], Paris, probably after c. 1893;⁴ (Duveen Brothers, London, in 1907); (F. Kleinberger & Co., Paris, in 1909); Léonardus Nardus [1868–1930], Suresnes, France.⁵ Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, by 1911; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

Exhibited: *Exhibition of Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School...*, (Winter Exhibition) Royal Academy, London, 1882, no. 99. Washington 1969, no. 9.

THIS freely brushed sketch of a bearded old man wearing a beret is one of four oil studies on panel that depict the same model.⁶ Traditionally these works have been considered autograph sketches that Rembrandt made in preparation for his painting of *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, 1661, now in the Louvre, Paris (fig. 1).⁷ In recent years, however, only one of these sketches, in a private English collection, has been accepted as by Rembrandt.⁸

The broad, impressionistic handling of the paint of the *Head of Saint Matthew* was considered a hallmark of Rembrandt's late style when this sketch first entered the Rembrandt literature in the 1880s. Indeed, during the last years of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, a large number of sketches attributed to Rembrandt's later years were added to his oeuvre, particularly by Wilhelm von Bode and Wilhelm Valentiner. Scholars now recognize that many of these works, including this one, lack the structure of form that underlies Rembrandt's own creations. An x-radiograph of the painting (fig. 2) confirms that the Rembrandtesque characteristics of the image derive from broad brushstrokes across the surface of the image and that