

### Bibliography

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Schrevelius 1648: 289.  
Houbraken 1753, 1: 90–95.  
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Valentiner 1921a.  
Haarlem 1962.  
Slive 1970–1974.  
Grimm 1972.  
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1940.1.12 (498)

## *A Young Man in a Large Hat*

1626/1629

Oil on oak, 29.3 x 23.2 (11<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

**Technical Notes:** The original support is a single oak panel with a vertical grain set into a 0.5 cm wide collar of oak that does not appear to be original. Dendrochronology dates the panel to an earliest felling date of 1625, with an estimated date for use of 1629.<sup>1</sup> Both panel and protective collar are beveled along all four edges on the back. A check at the top right corner is the only damage to the support. The ground is a thick white layer that leaves the grain pattern visible and extends to the edge of the original panel in all areas save the lower right corner.

Paint is applied thinly in quick fluid strokes with rounded ends. Highlights are applied thickly, worked wet on wet into the thin underlayers. The sketchy nature of the painting is enhanced by some intentional rubbing in of thin paint layers. The painting is in excellent condition, with scattered small losses discretely inpainted. An aged but only slightly discolored varnish layer is present. No major conservation treatment has been carried out since acquisition.

**Provenance:** C. J. Bredius, Woerden by 1918.<sup>2</sup> (M. Knoedler & Co., New York and Paris); sold 30 January 1929 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 June 1937 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

**Exhibited:** Washington 1989b, 244, no. 39, color repro.

THE IDENTITY of the impish young man who turns in his chair and smilingly gazes out at the viewer in this oil sketch is not known. Whether Hals' perceptive characterization was exclusively due to his artistic genius or was aided by a personal relationship to

the sitter may never be determined; nonetheless, it should be noted that Hals' son Harmen (1611–1669) would have been in his middle to late teens when this sketch was painted, 1626/1629.<sup>4</sup> This age seems probable for the sitter, particularly given his fashionable wardrobe and sporty mustache.

That the painting depicts a specific individual can be argued not solely on the basis of the characterization but also because of the oval illusionistic frame that surrounds the figure. Hals frequently included such painted framing devices on small-scale portraits in the 1610s and 1620s. An identical painted frame, for example, acts as a foil for the sitter's expressive gesture in Hals' *Portrait of a Man*, 1627 (fig. 1). Although the dramatic effect of the man's gesture as he reaches through the picture plane is not as pronounced in the Washington painting, the young man's elbow does extend slightly beyond the painted frame. More important compositionally for Hals was the use of the oval frame in this painting to reinforce the dynamic spatial character of the pose.

A number of Hals' small-scale portraits were en-

Fig. 1. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, 1627, oil on copper, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie





Frans Hals, *A Young Man in a Large Hat*, 1640.1.12

graved, and the theory has been advanced that the painted sketches were intended as *modelli* for that purpose.<sup>5</sup> While it may well be that those who wished to have their portraits engraved, primarily preachers and scholars, specifically requested small-scale portraits to present to reproductive engravers, not all portraits of this scale—among them *A Young Man in a Large Hat*—were engraved. Thus it should not be assumed that the sketch's primary function was as an engraver's model. A strong tradition of hanging small-scale painted portraits existed in the Netherlands, particularly in Haarlem, during the 1620s and 1630s. In Jan Miense Molenaer's *Family Portrait Making Music*, c. 1636 (Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, on loan from the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, The Hague), for example, a sequence of small portraits of family members can be seen on the back wall of the room.<sup>6</sup>

If Hals' small portrait of a young man fits into this tradition, it nevertheless breaks from it in a fundamental way. As the figure turns in his chair and smiles at the viewer, he seems more related to genre scenes than to contemporary portraits, which are more formal. Hals' painting technique, moreover, is extremely free. The closest stylistic parallels in his work are with genre figures, in particular the *Boy Holding a Flute*, c. 1626–1628 (Staatliches Museum, Schwerin),<sup>7</sup> which suggest that in this memorable sketch he sought to merge portrait and genre imagery.

Indirectly, the connections to genre painting are also evident in the relationship of the pose of the young man with those of figures in contemporary merry company scenes, particularly works by Hals' younger brother Dirck.<sup>8</sup> The National Gallery's picture is even closer to Dirck's imagery when one considers the freely executed oil sketches on paper that served as models for figures in such paintings, for example a *Seated Man*, c. 1627, now in Paris (Institut Néerlandais).<sup>9</sup> In another of Dirck's sketches, *Seated Man with a Pipe*, c. 1627 (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, inv. no. 1965:180), the figure leans over exactly the same type of chair as does the young man in the Washington oil sketch.<sup>10</sup> While comparisons with these studies by Dirck Hals help place *A Young Man in a Large Hat* thematically and chronologically, they also demonstrate the masterful execution of the Washington panel. Dirck never developed the ability to suggest the form of a hand with bold, swelling touches of the brush or to soften the modeling of a face with a sequence of short parallel strokes, effects so brilliantly rendered in this work. Frans Hals also used a wide range of

quick notations to animate the costume, from the broad angular strokes of the jacket sleeve to the delicate touches of the brush that indicate the white lace.

#### Notes

1. Dendrochronology by Dr. Peter Klein, Ordinariat für Holzbiologie, Universität Hamburg, 1 May 1987.
2. According to Schneider 1918–1919, 368, Bredius acquired this sketch for fl 60 as part of an inheritance. The painting was at that time attributed to Jan Miense Molenaer. The attribution to Hals was made by Abraham Bredius, who persuaded his relative to lend the painting for a while to the Mauritshuis. Later references to earlier owners Van der Hoop and Slochteren (see Slive 1970–1974, 3: 41–42, no. 66) cannot be confirmed.
3. The painting was also exhibited at the Mauritshuis, The Hague, in 1919.
4. Washington 1989b, 375; Harmen, who was baptized in Haarlem on 2 September 1611, followed in his father's footsteps as a painter, although he inherited none of his father's ability. He was buried on 15 February 1669 in Haarlem. Professor Seymour Slive has kindly drawn my attention to an unpublished drawing in the Haarlem archives that depicts Harmen Hals later in his life. The facial characteristics seen in the drawing are not unrelated to those in the painting.
5. Slive 1970–1974, 1: 124.
6. Reproduced in Haarlem 1969, 69, cat. 213b.
7. Washington 1989b, cat. 28, repro.
8. Discussed in Berlin-Dahlem 1978, 199, no. 816A.
9. Collection Lugt, inv. no. 1796.
10. See Schatborn 1973, 107–116.

#### References

- 1918–1919 Schneider: 368–369, repro.  
 1921b Valentiner: 309, 50 repro. (also 1923 rev. ed.: 309, 51 repro.).  
 1930 Dülberg: 94, 95, repro.  
 1936 Valentiner: unpaginated, no. 16, repro.  
 1941 NGA: 96, no. 498.  
 1941 Trivas: 31–32, no. 23, pl. 36.  
 1965 NGA: 65, no. 498.  
 1968 NGA: 58, repro.  
 1970–1974 Slive, 2 (1970): pl. 110; 3 (1974): 41–42, no. 66.  
 1972 Grimm: 27, 80, 201, no. 42.  
 1974 Montagni: 94–95, no. 67, repro. (also 1976 French ed.)  
 1975 NGA: 170–171, no. 498, repro.  
 1976 Walker: 268–269, no. 354, repro.  
 1985 NGA: 197, repro.  
 1989b Washington: 244, no. 39, repro.  
 1990 Grimm: 277, no. 48, repro., 234–235, fig. 123 b.