NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Anonymous Artist

Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606 - 1669

Head of Saint Matthew

probably early 1660s

oil on panel

overall: 25 x 19.5 cm (9 13/16 x 7 11/16 in.)

Widener Collection 1942.9.58

ENTRY

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.[1] Traditionally these works have been considered autograph sketches that Rembrandt made in preparation for his painting *Saint Matthew and the Angel,* 1661, now in the Louvre, Paris [fig. 1].[2] In the last fifty years, however, only one of these sketches, in the collection of Alfred Bader, has been generally accepted as by Rembrandt.[3]

The broad, impressionistic handling of the paint in *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 century and the first decades of the twentieth, 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 [see X-radiography] 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 the head lacks the firm modeling so typical of the master's works.

The first scholar to reject the attribution to Rembrandt in print was Bauch in 1966.[4] Van Regteren Altena concluded that the broad handling had characteristics of nineteenth-century imitations of Rembrandt.[5] Gerson agreed that this work was "an imitation of a later period."[7]

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Dating such studies can be extremely difficult, because followers of Rembrandt from his own time through the nineteenth century have emulated his work with little variation in style. In this instance examinations of the paints and panel have not yielded information that helps provide a specific chronological framework for the painting. Although the character of the paints is consistent with seventeenth-century studio practice, similar materials are also found on later paintings. The only unusual feature for Rembrandt is the presence of verdigris under the beard, but verdigris is found in seventeenth-century paintings. Although Dendrochronology could not date the oak panel, the irregular beveling is similar to that found in seventeenth-century paintings. There thus are no technical grounds for questioning the work's seventeenth-century origin.

Because of differences in the figure's expression and in the character of the beret, it is unlikely that this study is a copy of the head of Saint Matthew from *Saint Matthew and the Angel.* It seems more probable that it and the other *tronies* depicting this figure were made in Rembrandt's workshop while the master was occupied with the Louvre painting.[6] From the evidence of drawings it is known that Rembrandt, as part of his teaching process, encouraged his students to work from live models. This painting could have been such a study piece, executed by an unidentified student around 1661.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, 1661, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © RMN

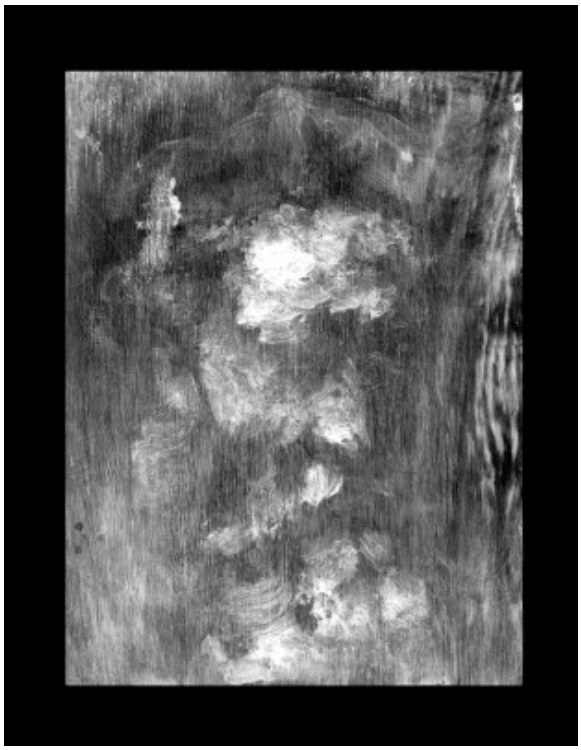

fig. 2 X-radiograph composite, Rembrandt Workshop, *Head of Saint Matthew*, probably early 1660s, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.58

NOTES

[1] The other three studies are: *Head of an Old Man,* panel, 25 x 22 cm, Musée Bonnat, Bayonne (Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt, Schilderijen* [Vienna, 1935], 303; *Head of an Old Man,* panel 24.5 x 20 cm, Alfred and Isabel Bader Collection, Milwaukee (David de Witt, *The Bader Collection: Dutch and Flemish Paintings* [Kingston, 2008], 273–274, no. 165, repro.); and *Head of an Old Man,* panel, 27 x 22 cm, formerly William McAneeny, Detroit (Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt, Schilderijen* [Vienna, 1935], 305). Another study of the same man, also attributed to Rembrandt, is in the Museo Nacionale de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires (oil on paper set down on panel, 22 x 16 cm).

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[2] The opinion was most recently expressed by Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, and E. H. ter Kuile, *Dutch Art and Architecture: 1600–1800* (Baltimore, 1966), 78.

[3] Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, revised by Horst Gerson (London, 1969), 573, no. 304.

[4] Kurt Bauch, *Rembrandt Gemälde* (Berlin, 1966), 48, suggested that this sketch was based on another similiar sketch (Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt, Schilderijen* [Vienna, 1935], 13, no. 304), rather than on the painting *Saint Matthew and the Angel* in the Louvre, Paris, as Bredius proposed.

[5] J. Q. van Regteren Altena, review of Kurt Bauch, *Rembrandt Gemälde* (Berlin, 1966), *Oud-Holland* 82 (1967): 70–71.

[6] The only other instance for which there exists a number of studies from the same model by both Rembrandt and his workshop is *Head of a Young Jew* from the 1640s (Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt, Schilderijen* [Vienna, 1935], 620–627). See also Lloyd DeWitt, ed., *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus* (New Haven, Conn., 2011).

[7] Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, revised by Horst Gerson (London, 1969), no. 305.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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] The paint was applied over a granular gray ground. Pastose paint was used in the head and thin glazes were employed in the background. Many areas were worked wet-into-wet. Analysis indicates that the pigments are consistent with those found in seventeenth-century studio practice.[2] The painting, which is in excellent condition, was treated in 1994 to remove discolored varnish and inpainting.

[1] Dendrochronology report by Dr. Joseph Bauch, Universität Hamburg (see report dated November 29, 1977, in NGA Conservation department files).

[2] Pigments were analyzed by the Scientific Research department using X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (see reports dated June 29, 1994, and August 1, 1994, in NGA Conservation department files).

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PROVENANCE

Alfred Buckley, New Hall, England, by 1882.[1] Rodolphe Kann [1845-1905], Paris, probably after 1893 but by 1900;[2] purchased 1907 with the entire Kann collection by (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);[3] sold to (F. Kleinberger & Co., Paris);[4] by exchange to (Leo Nardus [1868-1955], Suresnes, France, and New York); by exchange early 1909 to Peter A.B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania;[5] inheritance from Estate of Peter A.B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] Buckley lent the painting to the 1882 Winter Exhibition at the Royal Academy in London.

[2] Émile Michel, *Rembrandt: sa vie, son oeuvre et son temps*, Paris, 1893: 432-433, lists the picture as still in Buckley's possession. It was catalogued with the Kann collection by Wilhelm von Bode, *Gemälde-Sammlung des Herrn Rudolf Kann in Paris*, Vienna, 1900: no. 7, repro.

[3] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reels 38 and 39, boxes 115-118, Stock books, Paris Ledger, and Sales Book for the Kann Collection.

[4] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 39, box 117, Paris Ledger, no. 1, Kann Collection.

[5] Nardus received this painting and NGA's *Head of an Aged Woman* (1942.9.64) from Kleinberger in exchange for a portrait of a lady by Hans Memling. The same two paintings, along with ten others, were sent to Widener in early 1909, as replacements for a dozen paintings Nardus had sold to and then took back from the collector, after they were deemed by art historians of the day to be modern copies of "Old Masters."

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These two transactions involving Nardus are revealed in correspondence between Widener, his lawyer, John G. Johnson, Nardus, and Nardus' assistant, Michel van Gelder, now in the John G. Johnson Collection Archives at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (box 5, folders 5 and 6, especially a letter, Michel van Gelder to John G. Johnson, 29 January 1909). The correspondence was found, transcribed, and kindly shared with the NGA by Jonathan Lopez (letter, sent with transcriptions, 24 April 2006, to Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., in NGA curatorial files). See also Jonathan Lopez, "'Gross False Pretenses': The Misdeeds of Art Dealer Leo Nardus," *Apollo*, ser. 2, vol. 166, no. 548 (December 2007): 80–81, fig. 8.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1882 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1882, no. 99.

1969 Rembrandt in the National Gallery of Art [Commemorating the Tercentenary of the Artist's Death], National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1969, no. 9, repro.

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