



Judith Leyster
Dutch, 1609 - 1660

Young Boy in Profile

c. 1630

oil on panel

diameter: 19 cm (7 1/2 in.)

framed: 35.24 × 35.08 × 4.45 cm (13 7/8 × 13 13/16 × 1 3/4 in.)

Gift of Mrs. Thomas M. Evans 2009.113.1

ENTRY

Judith Leyster possessed a remarkable ability to capture the personalities of her sitters, especially of children. [1] In this small tondo, painted on panel, a boy seen in strict profile gazes thoughtfully outside the picture plane. The gentle curves of his cheeks and button nose suggest that he is no more than 10 years old, but his alert stare and stoic pose convey a seriousness and maturity well beyond his years—a perfect encapsulation of the innocence and oftentimes precociousness of youth.

Despite his quiet demeanor, the young boy possesses an extraordinary liveliness and immediacy, which is owed largely to Leyster's energetic brush and vivid palette. She modeled his round cheeks and plump lips in fluid sweeps of rose that add the ruddy blush of childhood to his creamy complexion. Touches of brown above his head create the sensation that a few wisps of his soft locks have yet to come to rest. Delicate strokes across his eyelids and eyelashes convey a flickering sense of movement that brings life to the boy's youthful visage. Finally, Leyster used some sort of firm tool, perhaps the back of the brush, to scratch fine strands of hair into the wet paint to reveal the light ground below. Leyster used this same scratching technique to render strands of hair in *Last Drop* [fig. 1], which she also executed around 1630–1631.

Given her evident facility with portraiture, it is remarkable that Leyster only rarely painted portraits. Aside from this work, only two other portraits are known: her *Self-Portrait* of about 1630 and a 1635 portrait of a woman in the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. In both, the sitter's confident gaze and beguiling smile demonstrate Leyster's capacity to create the impression of a moment arrested in time. Leyster learned to capture this feeling of spontaneity from the greatest

portraitist of the day, Frans Hals (Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666), in whose studio she apparently worked in the late 1620s. Her vibrant palette and lively brushwork owe much to Hals' guidance and inspiration.

Initially, it would seem that *Young Boy in Profile* also relates directly to Hals' influence, to his depictions of children smiling impishly out at the viewer, drinking or playing music [fig. 2]. But, these engaging, small panel paintings from the 1620s are *tronies*, or character studies, and they belong to a different pictorial tradition than Leyster's quiet profile, which has all the characteristics of a portrait. [2]

The profile pose of the young boy derives from a classicizing artistic tradition unconnected to Frans Hals. In Haarlem, Frans de Grebber (1573–1649), who, according to Samuel Ampzing, [3] gave Leyster her earliest instruction, espoused, along with Salomon de Bray (1597–1664), a distinctly classicizing style that they hoped would elevate Dutch painting to the luster of antiquity. [4] Much like Leyster's small tondo, De Bray's *Young Woman in Profile* of 1636 relates to ancient Roman coins, cameos, and medals in its strict profile orientation. In Leiden, Jan Lievens (Dutch, 1607 - 1674) painted and etched a number of figures in profile, young and old alike, which may have been known to Leyster. In his *Young Girl in Profile*, c. 1631, Lievens, like Leyster, scratched into the wet paint to indicate the wisps of the girl's hair. Although the pensive, downcast eyes of Lievens' model indicate that this painting is a *tronie*—it was explicitly described as a *tronie* in an inventory of 1641—it and its related etching, *Young Girl with Long Hair* of c. 1628–1631 provide a further pictorial context for Leyster's painting. [5]

Leyster may have chosen this classicistic pose to reflect the status of this sitter, which may have been elevated to judge from the delicately painted lovelock and refined attire. The lovelock, a tress of hair worn long and to the left of the face, was said to have been introduced at the Parisian court in the early seventeenth century by Honoré d'Albert (1581–1649), marshal of France, lord of Cadanet, and duke of Chaulnes. [6] The style became particularly fashionable among the nobility in France, England, and Germany, although it never attained widespread popularity in the northern Netherlands. Aside from a few Dutchmen and foreign officers at The Hague in the circle of the Prince of Orange and the exiled king of Bohemia, Frederick V, elector Palatine of the Rhine (1596–1632), few examples of men (or children) sporting the coif are known. [7]

Aside from his hairstyle, the boy's outfit also has courtly associations. The gold-and-black piping on his plum-colored doublet resembles a decorative feature of

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

the livery and page uniforms worn at court in The Hague. [8] The small, white, linen ruff differs from the unstarched ruffs or flat, rectangular collars fashionable for children at that time, and reflects a more formal, late sixteenth-century style of dress. [9]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Judith Leyster, *Last Drop*, c. 1630–1631, oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art



fig. 2 Frans Hals, *Drinking Boy*, c. 1626, oil on panel, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin. Photo: Gabriele Broecker

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Alexandra Libby for her work on this entry.

[2] Peter C. Sutton, *Pleasures of Collecting: Part I, Renaissance to Impressionist*

Masterpieces, exh. cat., Bruce Museum of Arts and Science (Greenwich, CT, 2002): 81.

- [3] Samuel Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland* (Haarlem, 1628), 370, locates Leyster in Frans de Grebber's studio, possibly because De Grebber also trained Ampzing's daughter Maria (c. 1602–1680) and the author was unsure how to account for Leyster's education as a woman artist.
- [4] Even if Leyster did not study with De Grebber, she would have been keenly aware of his efforts to elevate the status of painters through his involvement in the early 1630s in reorganizing the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke on classical academies. E. Taverne, "Salomon de Bray and the Reorganization of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1631," *Simiolus* 6, no. 1 (1972–1973): 50–69.
- [5] Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington; Museum Het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam; Milwaukee Art Museum, (New Haven, 2008): cat. 28, 136. For the etching, see: cat. 59, 191.
- [6] Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (New York, 1965): 206. In French a lovelock is called a *cadanette* after its founder and in Dutch it is known as a *tutyen*.
- [7] Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings*, (Amsterdam, 2006): 139, 303, n. 17.
- [8] See, for example, representations of liveries in the bound album of Adriaen van de Venne's drawings in the British Museum, *Adriaen van de Venne's Common-Place Book*, which are reproduced in Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Adriaen van de Venne's Album in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London, 1988): 168, no. 13. See also *Alexander van Spaen in Page's Costume*, artist unknown, 1635, Brantsen van de Zyp Foundation, De Canneburch Castel, Vassen, which is reproduced in Marika Keblusek and Jori Zijlmans, eds., *Princely Display: The Court of Frederick Henry of Orange and Amalia of Solms* (Zwolle, 1997): 80, no. 62.
- [9] For a similar style ruff, albeit on a young girl, see Jan Claesz, *Six-Year-Old Girl*, 1594, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, illustrated in Jan Baptist Bedeaux and Rudi Ekkart, eds., *Pride and Joy*, exh. cat., Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (New York and Ghent, 2000): 107. The anachronism of the costume prompted Seymour Slive, who had seen the painting only in reproduction, to reject the work as a nineteenth-century imitation of a Frans Hals painting (Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. [London, 1970–1974], 3: cat. D16). However, pigment analysis has found only seventeenth-century materials, reinforcing the stylistic and technical evidence cited above.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is an oval, single-member panel with a diagonal wood grain. The reverse is beveled and bears toolmarks. It was prepared with a smooth, thin ground of cream or pinkish tan color. A slightly gray underpainting is evident in some areas. Infrared reflectography at 1.5 to 1.8 microns^[1] shows a possible underdrawing as well as some minor artist's changes in the boy's features. The changes are also apparent in the X-radiograph. The paint was applied both wet-into-wet and wet over dry in thin, fluid layers.^[2] The paint in the sitter's ruff is slightly more pastose. Throughout the boy's hair the artist scraped away the paint, perhaps with the end of a brush, to create the highlights.

The painting is in good condition. The panel is planar, though there is a small dent in the boy's shirt and one in his hair. Losses in the paint and ground are scattered throughout the composition. Additional losses and abrasion are found around the perimeter. Minor overpaint is found in the boy's ear, cheek, and lips, as well as further inpaint or overpaint along cracks in the wood grain. The varnish has yellowed slightly.

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

[2] The pigments were analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using X-ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy (XRF) (see report dated June 25, 2009 in NGA Conservation Department files).

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Switzerland. (Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam), at least in 1968. (Newhouse Gallery, New York); purchased by Thomas Mellon Evans [1910-1997], New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut; by inheritance to his wife, Mrs. Thomas M. Evans [née Betty Barton, 1923-2013], New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut; gift 2009 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1968 Catalogue de tableaux anciens exposés dans les salons de Kunsthandel P. de Boer N.V., Amsterdam, 1968, no. 18, repro., as *Tête d'enfant*.

2002 Pleasures of Collecting: Part I, Renaissance to Impressionist Masterpieces, Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut, 2002, unnumbered catalogue, repro., as *Head of a Young Girl*.

2009 Judith Leyster, 1609-1660, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2009, unnumbered brochure, fig. 7.

2014 Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Birmingham Museum of Art, 2014-2015, no. 19, repro. and fig. 9 (detail).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1968 Kunsthandel P. de Boer. *Catalogue de tableaux anciens exposés dans les salons de Kunsthandel P. de Boer N.V.*. Exh. cat. Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 1968: no. 18.
- 1970 Slive, Seymour. *Frans Hals*. 3 vols. National Gallery of Art Kress Foundation Studies in the History of European Art. London, 1970–1974: 3(1974):134, 170, no. 129.
- 2002 Sutton, Peter C., and Jennifer Ambrose. *Pleasures of collecting: Part I, Renaissance to impressionist masterpieces*. Exh. cat. Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, 2002: 81, repro.
- 2009 Hofrichter, Frima Fox. *Judith Leyster (1609-1660)*. Exh. brochure. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2009: 5, fig. 4.
- 2014 Wheelock, Arthur K, Jr. "The Evolution of the Dutch Painting Collection." *National Gallery of Art Bulletin* no. 50 (Spring 2014): 2-19, repro.
-

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Judith Leyster/*Young Boy in Profile*/c. 1630," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/142346> (accessed April 24, 2024).