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

Frans Hals
Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666

Portrait of an Elderly Lady

1633

oil on canvas
overall: 102.5 x 86.9 cm (40 3/8 x 34 3/16 in.)
framed: 142.4 x 126.7 x 15.2 cm (56 1/16 x 49 7/8 x 6 in.)
Inscription: center left: AETAT SVAE 60 / ANo 1633
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.67

ENTRY

Although the name of the sitter in this impressive portrait is not known, Hals has inscribed her age, sixty, and the date of the painting, 1633, in the background on the left. The small Bible or prayer book she holds in her right hand and her conservative black costume with its white millstone ruff collar convey a pious nature, yet Hals reveals far more about her through her face and hands than through her costume or book. With broad strokes of the brush he captures her lively, robust personality. The woman's self-confidence is expressed in the twinkle of her eyes, in the firm grasp of her hand on the arm of the chair, and in the strong silhouette of her form against the light gray background.

This painting demonstrates the range in Hals' brushwork for commissioned portraits of the early 1630s. At this stage of his career, projecting the three-dimensionality of the figure through strong modeling of the features was of primary importance. The form of the head is built up in planes of light that are accented with firm strokes in the highlights and shadows. The white lace cap and collar are carefully depicted, as the artist sought to project not only their detail but also their translucence. While he also articulated the design in the black jacket with great care, he indicated the folds of the skirt with comparatively free brushstrokes that suggest the flickering of light off its surface.

The woman's pose is adapted from a portrait Hals had executed two years earlier of Cornelia Claesdr Vooght [fig. 1],[1] but the differences between these paintings are as remarkable as their similarities. By intensifying his light in the Washington painting, Hals has accented the woman's features and given her greater three-dimensional presence. He has augmented this effect by flattening the angle of her

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collar, shifting the position of her right hand so that it is turned more toward the viewer, and placing her in a low-backed chair to allow her form to be silhouetted against a light background. The result of these changes is that the personality of the woman in the Washington painting is projected in a remarkably forceful and direct manner.

Cornelia Claesdr Vooght was the wife of the Haarlem burgomaster Nicolaes van der Meer, whose companion portrait Hals also painted in 1631 [fig. 2].[2] Following portrait conventions that had been developed by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640) in the late 1610s, Hals juxtaposed a standing man with a seated woman.[3] The pose of Nicolaes van der Meer, who rests one hand on the back of a chair and holds his gloves with the other, offers a clue to identifying a possible pendant to the Washington painting: it may well be the *Portrait of an Elderly Man* in the Frick Collection [fig. 3],[4] in which the figure assumes a pose similar to Van der Meer's. The proposal that the two works are pendants, first advanced by Wilhelm Valentiner, has been a matter of some dispute.[5] Slive argued against it in 1974, largely because he dated the Frick painting 1628–1630, and also stated that their provenances and dimensions differ (the Frick painting measures 115.6 by 91.4 centimeters).[6] In 1989, however, he noted that neither provenance extends back before the nineteenth century. Both works have actually been reduced in size, the Frick painting along the bottom and left edges and the Washington painting on all four sides.[7] It is possible that the original format of these paintings approached that of the Haarlem ones, which are more vertical in shape.

Stylistically, there are arguments for placing the Frick portrait in about 1633, despite the blond tonality of the painting that Slive rightly associates with Hals' works from the late 1620s. In the Frick's painting, as in the National Gallery of Art picture, the figure boldly faces the viewer as light firmly models his features. His costume, particularly in the shoulder and sleeve design, is similar to that in *Portrait of a Man*, 1633, now in the National Gallery, London.[8] These works are also comparable stylistically, not only in the careful way in which the hair is delineated and in the broad, plain modeling of the face, but also in the bold strokes of the costume with precise additions of final details such as the black brocade pattern in the Washington portrait and the black tufts on the sleeve of the Frick painting. Both the Frick and the National Gallery of Art portraits also used similar materials: the canvases were prepared with a cream-tan Ground lightly tinted with brown earth, both backgrounds were loosely painted over olive-green Underpainting, and the dark gray-black paint of the final costume details has developed the same fine

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drying cracks in both paintings.[9]

Finally, one may also argue for the relationship of the Washington and Frick paintings in the way each of them varies from their prototype in the Haarlem pair. The hierarchical, frontal images of the 1631 portraits of the burgomaster and his wife have given way to more informal poses in which the figures turn toward the viewer and communicate through their direct glances and smiling, open expressions, a suggestion, perhaps, of a different social status.[10]

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Frans Hals, *Cornelia Claesdr Vooght*, 1631, oil on panel, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. Photo: Margareta Svensson

fig. 2 Frans Hals, *Nicolaes Woutersz van der Meer*, 1631, oil on panel, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. Photo: Margareta Svensson

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fig. 3 Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, c. 1633, oil on canvas, Frick Collection, New York

NOTES

[1] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3: no. 78; 2: pl. 1240.

[2] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3: no. 77.

[3] Pendant portraits by Peter Paul Rubens of *Peter van Hecke* and *Clara Fourment*, c. 1630, with the man standing and the woman seated, are in the Mauritshuis, The Hague. See Ben Broos and Ariane van Suchtelen, *Portraits in The Mauritshuis 1430–1790* (Zwolle, 2004), 239–243, nos. 53, 54.

[4] *The Frick Collection: An Illustrated Catalogue—Paintings, American, British, Dutch, Flemish and German* (New York, 1968), 1:209, no. 10.1.69; Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3: no. 67.

[5] The possible relationship of these paintings was first proposed in Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Frans Hals: Des meisters Gemälde*, Klassiker der Kunst in

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Gesamtausgaben, vol. 28 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921), 108; and Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Frans Hals Paintings in America* (Westport, CT, 1936), no. 41; it was followed by Numa S. Trivas, *The Paintings of Frans Hals* (New York, 1941), 41.

[6] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3: no. 67. Claus Grimm, *Frans Hals: The Complete Work*, trans. Jürgen Riehle (New York, 1990), cat. 44, also dates the Frick painting to about 1628.

[7] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), 262, no. 45. The current tacking margins of *Portrait of an Elderly Lady* are covered with original paint. If they were flattened, the dimensions would be 105.6 by 89.4 centimeters. Three of the edges have been trimmed, leaving no unpainted margins. Since very little cusping of threads is visible along the edges, it seems probable that the image was still larger; its original size, however, cannot be determined. Recent technical study of the Frick painting suggests that the left edge has been reduced in addition to the reduction of the lower edge described in *The Frick Collection: An Illustrated Catalogue—Paintings, American, British, Dutch, Flemish, and German*. (New York, 1968), 1:209–210, no. 10.1.69 (see notes dated August 21, 2008, for the National Gallery of Art painting, and September 22, 2008, for the Frick painting in National Gallery of Art conservation department files).

[8] Neil MacLaren, *The Dutch School, 1600–1900* (London, 1960), no. 1251; Seymour Slive. *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3: no. 81.

[9] These remarks are based on examination of the two paintings (as in note 7 above) as well as analysis by the National Gallery of Art scientific research department using microscopic examination of cross-sections from both paintings (see notes dated August 21, 2008, for the National Gallery of Art painting, and September 22, 2008, for the Frick painting in National Gallery of Art conservation department files).

[10] No inscription appears on the Frick painting, and examination did not show evidence that an inscription has been effaced. In Hals' companion portraits *Lucas de Clercq* and *Feyna van Steenkiste*, 1635 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. nos. c 556, c 557; see Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. [London, 1970–1974], 3: nos. 104, 105), only the woman's portrait bears a date.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the original tacking margins trimmed. Part of the painting surface has been turned over all four stretcher edges to form a new tacking margin, reducing the height by at

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least 3 centimeters and the width by at least 2.5 centimeters (see text). The X-radiograph shows only faint cusping along the top and left edges. Above the book at the juncture of the dress and arm is a large repaired hole and adjacent vertical tear.

Paint is applied over a thin, cream-tan ground as a fluid paste, with impasto in thicker passages such as the brocade and book. The face and black dress are freely painted with wet-into-wet handling, and brushstrokes in the skirt and hands are left unblended. The black brocade pattern and final touches in the lace, ruff, and cap, all added in a final painting stage, create an impression of precision and restraint. Adjustments to the silhouette of the black drapery are visible to the naked eye. A cluster of small losses is found in the upper right corner, along with scattered small losses in the background and drapery, and a linear diagonal loss that passes through the proper left thumb. In 2008 the painting was treated to remove discolored varnish and overpaint. [1]

[1] During this treatment the painting was analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using microscopic examination of cross-sections (see notes dated August 21, 2008, in NGA Conservation department files).

PROVENANCE

Jurriaans;[1] (his sale, Van de Schley, Roos, and De Vries, Amsterdam, 28 August 1817, no. 20); Cornelius Sebille Roos [1754-1820], Amsterdam. Charlotte-Camille, Comtesse Boucher de la Rupelle [née de Tascher, d. 1911], Paris; sold by 1905 to (Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris); James Simon [1851-1932], Berlin, by 1906; (Abraham Preyer, The Hague);[2] purchased 12 June 1919 by (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);[3] held jointly with (Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd., London), June to November 1919);[4] (Duveen Brothers, Inc.); sold June 1920 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] The name is also inscribed on copies of the 1817 sale catalogue as “Jurjans.” See the description of Sale Catalogue N-298 in The Getty Provenance Index Databases, J. Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles.

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[2] From The Hague on 4 May 1919, Preyer cabled fellow dealers Scott and Fowles in New York that he had purchased the painting; see Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 229, box 374, folder 7.

[3] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 103, box 248, folder 22. Oddly, the Duveen prospectus, in NGA curatorial files, says the painting was acquired by Duveen in 1927, which is clearly an error.

[4] The painting was Agnew's stock number J1821. This information comes from the Agnew stock books, and is recorded in the Public Collections portion of the Getty Provenance Index® Databases. J. Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1905 Catalogue of 100 Paintings by Old Masters, Sedelmeyer Gallery, Paris, 1905, no. 13.

1906 Ausstellung von Werken alter Kunst, Kaiser-Friedrich Museum, Berlin, 1906, no. 49.

1939 Masterpieces of Art. European Paintings and Sculpture from 1300-1800, New York World's Fair, 1939, no. 179.

1989 Frans Hals, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, 1989-1990, no. 45, color repro.as Portrait of a Seated Woman.

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