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

Frans Hals
Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666

Portrait of a Member of the Haarlem Civic Guard

c. 1636/1638

oil on canvas
overall: 86 x 69 cm (33 7/8 x 27 3/16 in.)
framed: 110.2 x 95.3 x 7.6 cm (43 3/8 x 37 1/2 x 3 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.68

ENTRY

With great bravura, this fashionably clad member of the Haarlem civic guard stands with arm akimbo, staring out at the viewer. His flamboyant character, evident in his stance but reinforced through his arched eyebrows and stylish mustache, beard, and long, flowing locks of hair, conveys the sense of pride the Dutch felt in their military prowess during the formative years of the republic. By the late 1630s, when Hals painted this image, the Dutch had clearly demonstrated their superiority over the Spanish forces that had attempted to stem the revolt against Spanish rule. The citizens of Haarlem, in particular, had proven themselves in the early years of the conflict when they refused to capitulate to the Spanish troops who had besieged the city. Thanks to the fortitude and resistance of the citizenry, when Haarlem finally surrendered in the summer of 1573, the northern forces had gained time to gather enough strength to effectively counter the Spanish threat. Hals, a member of the Saint George civic guard since 1612, made a number of large group portraits of the militia companies, most of which are in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. This painting is one of only two known portraits in Hals' oeuvre of an individual soldier.[1] By Hals' time, the military front was sufficiently far to the south that the function of these militias had become more social than martial, which explains the presence of the elegant lace collar and cuffs that embellish this man's iron breastplate. The civic guards nevertheless remained mindful of their role in preserving the peace and harmony of their hometown.

As Arnold Houbraken and countless others have remarked, Hals painted the members of the civic guard "so forcefully and naturally . . . that it is as if they would

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address the onlooker!"[2] Hals, whose broad yet agile brushwork could so effectively suggest the outward exuberance of the sitter, used a pose for the individual guardsman here that he favored throughout his career. Variations of it can be found in single portraits as early as about 1625 in the magnificent full-length *Willem van Heythusysen* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich)[3] and as late as the mid-1650s in the seated *Portrait of a Man* in the Hermitage.[4] Hals used virtually the same pose, but in reverse, in his portrait of the portly *Claes Duyst van Voorhout*, c. 1638 ([fig. 1]), which is datable to about the same time as the *Portrait of a Member of the Haarlem Civic Guard*.

The condition of the Washington picture is much better than has been suggested in past literature. Conservation treatment on the painting in 1991 revealed a vibrancy in the flesh tones and costume that had long been obscured by discolored varnish. The whites of the lace collar and cuffs, the sheen of the metal clasp on the officer's cuirass, and the ocher and oranges of his jacket and sash are vividly rendered. Aside from the gray Glazing that softens the area between the eyes, the face has not suffered Abrasion as Slive thought,[5] nor has the figure been altered by extensive Overpainting as Grimm believed.[6] Finally, the conservation treatment confirmed that the background landscape vista that Grimm called into question is Hals' original concept. While this view onto a distant, evening landscape with its striking orange and blue palette is unusual for Hals, the character of the paint is totally consistent with the rest of the work.[7]

The rich blues in the landscape have in the past been thought to represent the sea, and thus the painting has at various times since the nineteenth century been interpreted as representing an admiral or naval officer.[8] The vista, however, is quite undefined other than the suggestions of trees in the foreground. The flat plain in the background could very well be land, particularly since no boats are visible. Nothing in the costume, moreover, indicates that the sitter is a naval officer, or, for that matter, an officer of any type. He is wearing a standard pikeman's cuirass, such as was worn in Haarlem's civic guard companies or in the army of the Dutch Republic.[9] Given Hals' close ties to the Haarlem civic guard companies of Saint George and Saint Hadrian, the former possibility is the more likely.[10] Each militia battalion was divided into three companies that could be distinguished by the colors of the rebel flag—orange, white, and blue—and the vivid sash around the waist of this unidentified man indicates that he was a member of the orange company.[11] Outfitted as he is in a broad-brimmed black hat and fashionable lace collar and cuffs, he clearly has dressed for the painter's brush and not for battle.

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This portrait has been dated at various periods of Hals' career, but recent scholars have placed it at the end of the 1630s on the basis of comparisons with the artist's civic guard painting *Officers and Sergeants of the Saint George Civic Guard Company* in the Frans Hals Museum, which he executed in about 1639 [fig. 2].[12]Hals was a member of this company and portrayed himself, standing in the left background, staring at the viewer. His facial features are remarkably similar to those in this *Portrait of a Member of the Haarlem Civic Guard*, so much so that one wonders if this image is, in fact, a self-portrait.

Many stylistic associations exist between this portrait and Hals' last civic guard group portrait. Not only are the tonalities of the ochers and oranges comparable, but so are the slashing diagonal strokes used to indicate the folds in the sleeve and sash. The style of the costume is similar, as well as that of the sitter's hair, mustache, and beard. Nevertheless, the guardsman's face is not as freely executed as those in the group portrait. The features are quite precisely delineated with firm strokes of the brush and modeled with crisp shadows. These stylistic characteristics share much in common with portraits from the mid-1630s, such as the *Portrait of a Man, presumably Pieter Tjarck* in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which Slive dates 1635/1638.[13] Thus it is probable that this work predates Hals' 1639 civic guard group by a year or two.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Frans Hals, *Claes Duyst van Voorhout*, c. 1638, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jules Bache Collection, 1949. Photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

fig. 2 Frans Hals, *Officers and Sergeants of the Saint George Civic Guard Company*, c. 1639, oil on canvas, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. Photo: Margareta Svensson

NOTES

[1] The other portrait, *Portrait of an Officer*, is in the Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brazil. See Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974).

[2] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*. 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 1:92; a translation by Michael Hoyle is in Seymore Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), 18.

[3] Seymore Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), no. 17, ill.

[4] Seymore Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), no. 73, ill.

[5] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:67, no. 125.

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[6] Claus Grimm, *Frans Hals: Entwicklung, Werkanalyse, Gesamtkatolog* (Berlin, 1972), 25, no. 99.

[7] Hals included landscape vistas in only two other portraits of single figures: *Isaac Abrahamsz Massa*, 1626 (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto), and *Portrait of a Man in a Slouch Hat*, c. 1660–1666 (Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel).

[8] The first association of the figure with a naval officer was in the 1863 catalog of the Hermitage, 165, no. 773, where it was termed "Portrait d'un amiral." Most subsequent references continue this designation. Although Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:67, no. 125, gave the painting the neutral title *Portrait of a Man Wearing a Cuirass*; he wrote: "The view of the sea seen through the opening in the wall suggests that the model may have been a naval officer."

[9] For a comparable pikeman's cuirass, see M. Carasso-Kok and J. Levy-van Halm, eds., *Schutters in Holland: Kracht en zenuwen van de stad* (Haarlem, 1988), 218, no. 35, repro.

[10] Not only did Hals paint the Saint George civic guard company three times and the Saint Hadrian civic guard company twice, he was a member of the former from 1612 to 1624. See Irene van Thiel-Stroman in Seymore Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), 375–376, doc. 11.

[11] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 1:41, explains that the civic guards were divided into three companies "designated 'orange' (*oranje*), 'white' (*witte*) and 'blue' (*blauwe*), the colors of the newly established country."

[12] The early catalogs of the Hermitage proposed that this painting was a pendant to the *Portrait of a Man* of the 1650s. This association might have been made if Catherine the Great purchased them together, which seems possible, for in the catalog of 1774 they are listed sequentially as nos. 268 and 269. No information is known about their earlier provenance, despite the statement in National Gallery of Art, *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1941), 94, no. 68, that the *Portrait of a Soldier* was acquired by Catherine the Great from the Walpole Collection. The Hals painting Catherine acquired from that great collection was the Gallery's *Portrait of a Young Man* (1937.1.71). Wilhelm von Bode, *Studien zur Geschichte der holländischen Malerei* (Braunschweig, 1883), 90, no. 131, was the first to note that these works belonged to different periods of Hals' career. He dated them 1635 and 1660 respectively. Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Frans Hals: Des meisters Gemlde*, Klassiker der Kunst in Gesamtausgaben 28 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921), 222, dated the *Portrait of a Soldier* around 1646–1647. Numa S. Trivas, *The Paintings of Frans Hals* (New York, 1941), 49, no. 74, was the first to date the painting about 1639. He was followed in this dating by Claus Grimm, *Frans Hals: Entwicklung, Werkanalyse,*

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Gesamtkatolog (Berlin, 1972), 25, no. 99, and Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:67, no. 125.

[13] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974) 3:59, no. 108.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support consists of a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, with part of the original tacking margin incorporated into the top edge. In a past restoration, the top, left, and right tacking margins were trimmed, and these edges were extended with 1.5-centimeter-wide fabric strips. The paint layer present on the extensions is neither original nor of recent application. The original fabric and extensions have been lined. Cusping is found along all edges of the original support, indicating that the present dimensions have not been greatly reduced.

Paint was applied over a smooth white ground in fluid pastes and thin washes, in unblended brushstrokes, dots, and dabs of low impasto. A red underlayer visible in some areas may be part of an overall or locally applied imprimatura. Colored glazes were used extensively in the drapery. Lining has emphasized the canvas weave and slightly flattened the paint texture. Apart from a small loss in the hat, losses are confined to the edges. The brown glazes of the face and hair and blue green paint of the landscape are moderately abraded, and the darks of the clothing slightly abraded. The painting was restored in 1991.

PROVENANCE

Catherine II, empress of Russia [1729-1796], Saint Petersburg, by 1774; Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg; sold March 1931 through (Matthiesen Gallery, Berlin; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London; and M. Knoedler & Co., New York) to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 30 March 1932 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1937 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1989 Frans Hals, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1989, not in catalogue.

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1998 Museums of the World: Homage to the Pushkin Museum Centenary, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 1998, unnumbered catalogue.

2003 Dutch and Flemish Treasures from the National Gallery of Art, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, 2003, no catalogue.

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1774 Imperial Hermitage Museum [probably Ernst von Münnich, ed.]. *Catalogue des tableaux qui se trouvent dans les Cabinets du Palais Impérial à Saint-Pétersbourg*. Based on the 1773 manuscript catalogue. Saint Petersburg, 1774: no. 269, as *Portrait d'un officier*.

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