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

Frans Hals
Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666

Portrait of a Young Man

1646/1648

oil on canvas
overall: 68 x 55.4 cm (26 3/4 x 21 13/16 in.)
framed: 103.2 x 91.4 x 14.6 cm (40 5/8 x 36 x 5 3/4 in.)
Inscription: center right with double monogram: FHFH
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.71

ENTRY

In this bust-length portrait, a portly young man rests his elbow on the back of his chair while he turns and looks directly at the viewer. His round, somewhat pudgy face is framed by shoulder-length curly hair and a black hat that rests squarely on his head. His black jacket is enlivened by a flat white collar with intricate lace edging.

Hals seems to have favored this portrait convention because of its relative informality. The momentary, turning pose and the rapid and bold brushstrokes enhance the lifelike quality of the image. As discussed in *Willem Coymans*, Hals used this pose at many stages of his career, but particularly in the 1640s. Indeed, the National Gallery of Art's *Willem Coymans*, signed and dated 1645, is one of the closest parallels to this image. Not only are the poses alike, but the paintings are also similar in the way that Hals modeled the faces more firmly than the broader, more suggestively rendered costumes. On the basis of such relationships, Seymour Slive has dated this painting about 1645.[1]

Minor variations in technique between these portraits, however, suggest that *Portrait of a Young Man* must date slightly later than the portrait of Willem Coymans. Hals has animated this sitter's face with rapidly applied light accents over the broad flesh tones that define the nose, cheeks, lower lip, and forehead. These strokes, just as those that articulate the eyebrows and mustache, are less integrated into the structure of the face than those in the Coymans portrait. Similarly, whereas in the Coymans portrait Hals conveys a sense of the translucent material from which the collar and sleeve are made, and of the elegantly brocaded pattern on the jacket, in the abstract rendering of the costume in *Portrait of a*

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Young Man neither the material character of the lace collar nor the lace pattern are suggested to such a degree. Finally, the lion's-head finial of the chair is depicted with a few wavy strokes that give little information about its structure.

The precise period of execution for this work is difficult to determine because Hals dated so few paintings after 1645. A probable date, however, is 1646/1648. Both the style of the collar and shape of the hat were in fashion in these years, as was shoulder-length hair. Hals' portrait *Adriaen van Ostade*, which can be dated about 1646/1648, shows comparable characteristics in the style of costume as well as the abstract way in which it is rendered. That portrait also exhibits the use of highlights to enliven the otherwise firmly structured face and its features.

The double monogram, unique in Hals' work, has been the subject of multiple interpretations. Slive suggests that a second monogram might have been added after the first one had been painted out for some reason.[2] The two monograms, however, overlap, and there is no evidence of an intervening paint layer between them. In the eighteenth century the double monogram was seen to indicate both the artist and the sitter. In 1736 Horace Walpole described the painting as a self-portrait of Frans Hals,[3] an identification that was repeated in an engraving (in reverse) after the painting, published in 1777.[4] This identification was followed by subsequent Hermitage catalogers. Later, when it became obvious that the sitter was too young to be Frans Hals, he was identified as Frans Hals the Younger (1618–1669).[5]Although Hals' son would have been the appropriate age for this portrait, no other supporting evidence for this identification exists, so the identity of the sitter and the reason for the double monogram remain mysteries.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

NOTES

[1] Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:86, no. 167.

[2] Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:86, no. 167. See also Wilhelm von Bode, *Studien zur Geschichte der holländischen Malerei* (Braunschweig, 1883), 90, no. 128. Bode speculated, on the basis of the monogram, that the artist might be Frans Hals' son Harmen Hals, but, after Bredius discovered that this artist's monogram was different in character,

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Bode immediately rejected his own hypothesis.

[3] Horace Walpole, "A Catalogue of the Right Honble. Sir Robert Walpole's Collection of Pictures," unsigned autograph manuscript (New York, 1736), Pierpont Morgan Library, The Morgan Library and Museum, PML 7586. He identified 430 paintings in his father's various houses. In the list entitled "A Catalogue of Sir Robert Walpole's Pictures at Chelsea," fol. 33–34, appears: "Francis Halls, Master to Godfrey Kneller . . . Francis Halls."

[4] The engraving was made by J. B. Michel. According to Seymour Slive. *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 3:86, the print is inscribed: "FRANCIS HALLS. / In the Common Parlour at Houghton / Size of the Picture 1F[oot] 3 ¼ I[nches] by 1F[oot] 7 1/2 I[nches] high / Published May 1st, 1777 by John Boydell Engraver in Cheapside, London. / F. Halls Pixit. G. Farington del. J.B. Michel sculpsit."

[5] Petr Petrovich Semenoff, *Études sur l'histoire de la peinture néerlandaise*, 2 vols. (Saint Petersburg, 1885), 1:254, and Andrei Ivanovich Somov, *Ermitage Impérial: Catalogue de la galerie des tableaux,* 3rd. ed., 2 vols. (Saint Petersburg, 1901), 2:139–140, no. 770.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support is a plain-woven fabric composed of heavy threads irregularly spun with numerous slubs, loose ends, and weave faults. It has been lined with most of the original tacking margins retained. Pressure upon lining has caused an emphasis of the coarse canvas texture and flattening of impasto. The support was laced onto a temporary strainer for priming. Remnants of the thick laces remain along the left and right edges. Cusping patterns also suggest that the primed fabric was re-laced to the strainer for painting before attachment to a stretcher. The support is sound, aside from a small hole to the right of the head.

A warm tan granular ground layer is visible between broad brushstrokes of paint, which was applied in thin layers worked rapidly wet-into-wet and modeled with sharp, unblended brushstrokes. The background was applied first, with a reserve left for the face, which was painted next, followed by the clothing. The hair was worked over the face to define its precise contours.

Scattered small losses are found overall, particularly along the edges. The bottom edge is ragged and damaged. Abrasion is slight. The painting underwent conservation treatment in 2007 to remove discolored varnish and inpainting.

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PROVENANCE

Sir Robert Walpole, 1st earl of Orford [1676-1745], Houghton Hall, Norfolk, by 1736;[1] by inheritance to his son, Robert Walpole, 2nd earl of Orford [1700-1751], Houghton Hall; by inheritance to his son, George Walpole, 3rd earl of Orford [1730-1791], Houghton Hall; sold 1779 through Count Aleksei Semonovich Musin-Pushkin, Russian ambassador to England, to Catherine II, empress of Russia [1729-1796], Saint Petersburg; Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg; sold February 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 1 May 1937 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] Horace Walpole, "A Catalogue of the Right Honble. Sir Robert Walpole's Collection of Pictures," 1736, autograph manuscript unsigned, pp. 33-34, PML 7586, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1996 Houghton Hall: The Prime Minister, The Empress and The Heritage, Castle Museum Norwich; Kenwood House, London, 1996-1997, no. 12, repro., as Portrait of a Seated Man.

2013 Houghton Revisited: The Walpole Masterpieces from Catherine the Great's Hermitage, Houghton Hall, King's Lynn, 2013, no. 12, repro.

2014 Houghton Hall: Portrait of an English Country House, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, 2014-2015, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

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