



Thomas de Keyser  
Dutch, 1596 - 1667

# *Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff*

1627

oil on copper

overall (octagonal): 28 x 22 cm (11 x 8 11/16 in.)

Inscription: center left, in monogram: TDK. ANo 16[2]7

The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund 2012.12.1

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## ENTRY

With his frank gaze, the gentleman in this compelling portrait has a commanding yet sympathetic presence, further enhanced by rosy cheeks and the hint of a smile in his eyes, and by the amazing light effects on the face and ruff that help bring energy and life to the portrait. [1] His appealing countenance suggests strength of character, while the receding hairline and crow's-feet radiating out from his eyes signal maturity. Thomas de Keyser used meticulous brushstrokes to carefully render these features as well as the soft hairs of the sitter's mustache and beard. The realism of the magnificent lace-tipped ruff that frames the man's head is strengthened by a few unruly folds of lace that have popped up to cover small sections of his lower jaw. The brownish-red wool jacket, with rows of beaded buttons down its front and sleeves, reinforces the sense that this man, while stylish, is sensible.

De Keyser created this remarkable portrait in 1627, when he was at the height of his artistic powers. As with many of his finest works, he painted it on a small copper panel and likely chose an octagonal shape as a framing device to increase the

visual strength of this bust-length portrait. [2] The copper's smooth surface allowed him to paint with the exquisite refinement for which he was celebrated and to convincingly capture light to model, define, and animate the figure. The sitter's warm engagement with the viewer, evident particularly in the man's eyes, suggests that a personal relationship may have existed between him and the artist, as was the case in several other portraits by De Keyser from the 1620s.

The second son of Hendrick de Keyser (1565–1621), famed Dutch architect and master stonemason to the city of Amsterdam, Thomas de Keyser grew up in a house that was part of the municipal stone yard. Thomas and his three brothers all became highly regarded master stonemasons and stone merchants in their own right. Only Thomas, however, branched out into painting as a young man and established himself as the most celebrated portraitist in Amsterdam in the 1620s and early 1630s. In addition to tightly focused traditional works such as *Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff* and full-length group portraits, De Keyser gained lasting renown for two significant innovations in portraiture style: small-scale yet full-length formal portraits and depictions of sitters in their personal or professional environments that bridged the fields of portraiture and domestic genre scenes. [3]

The Gallery's painting can be compared to several other early portraits executed in the traditional close-cropped, bust-length style, including De Keyser's drawn portrait of his father, Hendrick, in 1621, the year of the latter's death. While the drawing has not survived, Jonas Suyderhoff's print after the drawing features the same three-quarter pose close to the picture-plane and sitter engagement with the viewer as the Gallery's portrait. [4] De Keyser's appealing *A Young Man with Ruff* (c. 1620–1624, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT) is also comparable to the Gallery's painting in the figure's pose, the refined and evenly applied brushwork, and the intimate depiction of personality. [5] The Hartford portrait could actually be the "likeness of Willem de Keyser" mentioned in a notarial record describing the attempts of Thomas's brother Willem (1603–after 1674) to hide certain family heirlooms from creditors when facing bankruptcy in 1658. [6]

By the mid-1620s, Thomas de Keyser's reputation garnered him patrons among the elite in other towns as well. It is telling that Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), the personal secretary of Frederick Hendrick, the Prince of Orange, selected De Keyser to paint his portrait in 1627 despite having already expressed his admiration for the work of two young artists in Leiden, Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669) and Jan Lievens (Dutch, 1607 - 1674). De Keyser's strong influence on early portraits by Rembrandt, painted in the period after the latter moved from Leiden to

Amsterdam around 1632, further confirms the high regard his contemporaries had for his work. [7] Executed the same year as the Gallery's intimate painting, *Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and His (?) Clerk* (1627, National Gallery, London) exemplifies De Keyser's trailblazing fusion of genre painting and full-length portraiture. [8] He depicts Huygens in his study, where he is attended by his clerk and surrounded by attributes of both his professional life as worldly diplomat and statesman and his private life, which was filled with music. In the genre portrait De Keyser provides a narrative of Huygens's life and interests, whereas in the Gallery's work he has brought the sitter close to the picture plane, zeroing in on the man's face. The neutral background, the ebullient white ruff, and the man's direct engagement with the viewer enhance this emphasis on likeness and personality. Despite their significant differences, both paintings are superb examples of the artist's skills and versatility in portraiture. The number and variety of portrait commissions De Keyser received testify to his appeal to his contemporaries, and his paintings continue to elicit high praise for their assured handling, original colors, attention to details, and "the firm and delicate modelling and exquisite refinement that mark [De Keyser's] master-pieces." [9]

De Keyser also received several commissions for group portraits of civic guard companies and board members of civic institutions, some of which he executed life-size, others in the same small scale as his genre portraits. In the group portraits, he varied the depiction of his sitters between three-quarter and full-length poses and showed them either seated or standing. [10] Even though he was forced to adjust the final composition of the painting due to space constraints, the life-size portraiture in *The Militia Company of Captain Allaert Cloeck and Lieutenant Lucas Jacobsz Rotgans* (1632, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) is another excellent example of De Keyser's exquisite brushwork and sensitive renderings of personality. [11] The magnificent wavy lace ruff that defines the face of Lieutenant Rotgans, in particular, echoes De Keyser's treatment of face and ruff in *Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff* done five years earlier.

The identity of the sitter in the Gallery's portrait is not certain, although it most likely depicts De Keyser's fellow artist Pieter Lastman (1583–1633). A poem by Joost van den Vondel published in 1628, one year after De Keyser painted this work, celebrates a *Portrait of Pieter Lastman* by Thomas de Keyser. [12] Lastman's estate inventory of 1632 lists a "portrait of [or by] Pieter Lastman in an octagonal frame," which Sebastien Dudok van Heel has identified as the painting mentioned in Vondel's poem. The language in the inventory is ambiguous, in that it describes

the portrait as “van” Lastman, which in Dutch can mean “of” as well as “by.” There are eleven paintings in the inventory listed as “van Lastman,” but ten of these are history paintings or landscapes, thus “van Lastman” must mean “by Lastman.” One portrait “van Lastman” is listed, but since Lastman is not known to have made any other portraits, in this case the word “van” presumably means “of” rather than “by.” Thus “een contrefejtsel van Pieter Lastman” probably refers to “a portrait of Pieter Lastman.” Despite some remaining doubt, this documentary evidence seems to support Dudok van Heel’s conclusion that the Gallery’s painting depicts Pieter Lastman. [13]

With its fine condition, bravura technique, and sitter’s engaging personality, *Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff* embodies the best of De Keyser’s lauded technical and observational skills and underscores why he was one of Amsterdam’s leading portraitists in the earlier decades of the 17th century.

Henriette Rahusen

December 9, 2019

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## NOTES

- [1] This entry relies heavily on the expertise of Ann Jensen Adams and her catalogue raisonné of De Keyser’s oeuvre. Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985). Adams identified 94 works as made by De Keyser over the course of an active but intermittent career that spanned 42 years, from 1619 to at least 1661. In the first catalogue raisonné of De Keyser’s work, however, Rudolf Oldenbourg identified 144 paintings by the hand of the master. Rudolf Oldenbourg, *Thomas de Keyser’s Tätigkeit als Maler: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des holländischen Porträts*, Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien 7 (Leipzig, 1911).
- [2] The painting’s 17th-century Dutch octagonal frame was a gift of Otto Naumann in 2012.
- [3] For biographical information, see A. W. Weissman, “Het geslacht De Keyser,” *Oud Holland* 22, no. 1 (1904): 65–91, especially 79–82; and Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), especially 1:18–44, 1:71–94, 2:416–420, 2:439–440.
- [4] Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A

Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 1:69–70, 3:207–210, no. P-2.

- [5] Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 3:16, no. 3, for the Hartford painting, and 1:69 for a description of De Keyser’s technique. Adams notes that De Keyser worked “in small and evenly applied brushstrokes whose freshness brings to mind the much larger canvases of Frans Hals. This technique creates a rich, warm surface.”
- [6] Among the items that Willem de Keyser tried to hide in 1658 was “een kontrefeytsel [a portrait] van Willem de Keyser.” Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 2:525, appendix B (transcription by S. A. C. Dudok van Heel). Thomas’s sensitive and intimate portrayal of the adolescent boy does lend credence to the possibility that the young man in the Hartford painting is indeed his younger brother Willem, who was born in 1603. If so, the portrait should be dated no later than 1620.
- [7] See, for example, Rembrandt’s *Portrait of a Bearded Man in a Wide-Brimmed Hat* (1633, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena). Following his move to Amsterdam in 1632, Rembrandt soon became the city’s most sought-after portraitist, and De Keyser increasingly turned his attention to the family business of international stone trade and stone masonry. Significant commissions in the 1650s and 1660s prove, however, that De Keyser never completely gave up painting professionally. In addition to portraits, he produced several history paintings and also became known, in the last decade of his life, for several finely executed small-scale equestrian portraits. Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 1:421–477.
- [8] For a full description of *Portrait of Constantijn Huygens and His (?) Clerk*, see Ann Jensen Adams, “The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7–1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 1:1, 1:16, 3:32–35, no. 13.
- [9] William Bürger, who published several versions of De Keyser’s monogram TdK, mistakenly called the artist Theodore rather than Thomas, but raved about his assured handling, original colors, and attention to details “without [the painter] ever losing a certain grandeur that stems from a straightforward and honest character.” Théophile E. J. Thoré (William Bürger), “Nouvelles Études sur la Galerie Suermondt à Aix-la-Chapelle,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 21, no. 1 (1869): 30. One generation later, Émile Michel added further praise when he noted that Rembrandt’s early portraits were rivaled by the bravura

of Frans Hals and “the firm and delicate modelling and exquisite refinement that mark [the] master-pieces of De Keyser.” Émile Michel, *Rembrandt: His Life, His Work, and His Time*, trans. Florence Simmonds (New York, 1894), 1:142.

- [10] See, for example, *Civic Guardsmen from the Company of Captain Jacob Symonszn de Vries and Lieutenant Dirck Jacobszn de Graeff* (1633, Amsterdam Museum) (figures in three-quarter length) and *The Burgomasters of Amsterdam Are Informed about the Arrival of Queen Marie de Medici* (1638, Amsterdam Museum) (figures in full length).
- [11] For an extensive description of the 1632 militia portrait and its preliminary drawings, see the Thomas de Keyser entry in Ger Luijten, Peter Schatborn, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Drawings for Paintings in the Age of Rembrandt* (Milan, 2016), 132–135, nos. 45, 46.
- [12] Lastman’s portrait by Thomas de Keyser and Vondel’s poem are mentioned in Houbraken’s mid-18th-century review of Dutch artists. Houbraken conceded that he had not seen the actual portrait. Arnold Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen* (The Hague, 1753; Amsterdam, 1976), 1:97–98. Citations refer to the 1976 edition. For the full text of Vondel’s poem “Op d’Afbeeldinge van Peter Lastman,” see Joost van den Vondel, *De werken van Vondel*, vol. 9, 1660–1663 (Amsterdam, 1936), 290, [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe09\\_01/vond001dewe09\\_01\\_0055.php](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe09_01/vond001dewe09_01_0055.php) (accessed March 26, 2018). Whereas Houbraken uses the first name Pieter, Vondel calls him Peter, perhaps because he compares the artist to Peter Paul Rubens.
- [13] The listing in question reads: “Een contrefejtsel van Pieter Lastman met een achtkante ebbe lijst” (a portrait of [or by] Pieter Lastman with an octagonal ebony frame). Sebastien Abraham Corneille Dudok van Heel, *De jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten: Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, 2006), 52, 54–55, 101, fig. 25, as “Mogelijk Portret van Pieter Lastman” (possibly the portrait of Pieter Lastman). For the full inventory of Lastman’s estate, see pages 100–102. The list contains five portraits (*contrefejtsels*) by other artists. In his catalogue raisonné of Lastman, Christian Seifert acknowledges Dudok van Heel’s identification, but does not include an image of the Gallery’s De Keyser portrait as the likeness of his study’s subject. Christian Tico Seifert, *Pieter Lastman: Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Petersberg, 2011), 57, 247 nn. 322 and 323. An invoice in the Gallery’s records states that *Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff* is De Keyser’s self-portrait, yet there is no supporting evidence for this alternative identification. Handwritten invoice from Frederik Muller & Cie to G. J. E. d’Aquin, December 8, 1926, no. 1040, charge of 4,000 guilders for two paintings previously in the Collectie Bischoffsheim: “De Keyser. *Zelfportret*” and “Terborch. *Portret van een Regent uit Deventer?*”

Thomas de Keyser file, NGA curatorial records, 2012. Unfortunately, no authenticated portrait of either Lastman or De Keyser exists that could shed a definitive light on this issue.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The primary support is a fairly thick octagonal copper panel that is slightly warped. The ground is gray-brown in color and of medium thickness. This layer was integrated into the final composition, used as shadows on the right side and bottom portion of the lace ruff. It is most easily visible at the intersection of the sitter's ruff and clothing as well as with the background. The paint was thinly applied in small, tight brushstrokes. The background was built up in one to two very thin, semitransparent layers over the ground, while the face and collar were applied using a slightly thicker opaque paint. The flesh tones were built up by applying a buff tone on top of the ground, followed by warm peach-colored paint layers. Low impasto used in the face creates the effect of wrinkles, such as in the crow's-feet around the eyes, as well as the texture of the lace-tipped ruff. Last, a warm, dark earth tone applied directly on top of the ground helped create the luminosity of the darkest shadows.

Through infrared reflectography two small pentimenti were identified: both the sitter's collar and the proper right ear were originally painted a little larger. [1] The support, ground, and paint layers are in good condition. There are scattered pinpoint losses throughout, with some clustered areas of loss in the sitter's mouth and below the ruff as well as along the proper left contour of the sitter's clothing. In addition, there is light abrasion throughout, especially in the proper right side of the sitter's hair. The painting was treated in 2013 to stabilize tented and flaking paint as well as to remove an old, nonoriginal discolored varnish.

Dina Anchin, based on the examination and treatment reports by Michael Swicklik

December 9, 2019

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## TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was carried out using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera filtered to 1.1–1.4 microns (J filter).

## PROVENANCE

Henri Louis Bischoffsheim [1828-1908], Bute House, London; (his estate sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 7 May 1926, no. 48); Martin. (Frederik Muller & Co., Amsterdam); sold 8 December 1926 to Count Gerard Joseph Emile d'Aquin [born 1865], as a self-portrait by De Keyser; by descent in his family; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, New York, 25 January 2012, no. 13); purchased by NGA.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

2021

Clouds, Ice, and Bounty: The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund Collection of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2021, no. 11, repro.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1985 Adams, Ann Jensen. "The Paintings of Thomas de Keyser (1596/7-1667): A Study of Portraiture in Seventeenth-century Amsterdam." 4 vols. in 2. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985: 1:68-69, 3:21, no. 6.
- 2006 Dudok van Heel, Sebastien Abraham Corneille. *De jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten: Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam*. Rotterdam, 2006: 52, 54-55, 100, fig. 25, as *Mogelijk Portret van Pieter Lastman*.
- 2012 Melikian, Souren. "The Classics of Yore Are Back." *Art + Auction* 35, no. 8 (April 2012): 67-68, color repro.
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**To cite:** Henriette Rahusen, "Thomas de Keyser/*Portrait of a Gentleman Wearing a Fancy Ruff*/1627," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/158097> (accessed January 28, 2022).