



Frans Hals  
Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666

## *A Young Man in a Large Hat*

1626/1629

oil on panel

overall: 29.3 x 23.2 cm (11 9/16 x 9 1/8 in.)

framed: 46.7 x 40.6 x 5.7 cm (18 3/8 x 16 x 2 1/4 in.)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1940.1.12

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### ENTRY

The identity of the impish young man in this oil sketch who turns in his chair and gazes out with a smile at the viewer is not known. Whether Hals' perceptive characterization was exclusively due to his artistic genius or was aided by a personal relationship to the sitter may never be determined. It should nonetheless be noted that Hals' son Harmen Hals (1611–1669) would have been in his middle to late teens when this sketch was painted, 1626/1629. [1] This age seems probable for the sitter, particularly given his fashionable wardrobe and sporty mustache.

That the painting depicts a specific individual can be argued based not solely on the characterization but also on the oval illusionistic frame that surrounds the young man. Hals frequently included such painted framing devices on small-scale portraits in the 1610s and 1620s. An identical painted frame, for example, acts as a foil for the sitter's expressive gesture in Hals' *Portrait of a Man*, 1627 [fig. 1]. Although the dramatic effect of that man's gesture as he reaches through the picture plane is more pronounced than in the Washington painting, the elbow of the young man in this work does extend slightly beyond the painted frame. Hals' use of the oval frame in this painting was more important compositionally, as it reinforces the dynamic spatial character of the pose. A number of Hals' small-scale

portraits were engraved, and the theory has been advanced that the painted sketches were intended as *modelli* for that purpose. [2] While it may well be that those who wished to have their portraits engraved, primarily preachers and scholars, specifically requested small-scale portraits to present to reproductive engravers, not all portraits of this scale—among them *A Young Man in a Large Hat*—were engraved. Thus it should not be assumed that the sketch’s primary function was as an engraver’s model. A strong tradition of hanging small-scale painted portraits existed in the Netherlands, particularly in Haarlem, during the 1620s and 1630s. In Jan Miense Molenaer’s *Family Portrait Making Music*, c. 1636 (Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland), for example, a series of small portraits of family members can be seen on the back wall of the room. [3]

If Hals’ small portrait of a young man fits into this tradition, it nevertheless breaks from it in a fundamental way. As the figure turns in his chair and smiles at the viewer, he seems related more to genre scenes than to contemporary portraits, which are more formal. Hals’ painting technique, moreover, is extremely free. The closest stylistic parallels in his work are with genre figures, in particular the *Boy Holding a Flute*, c. 1626–1628 (Staatliches Museum, Schwerin), [4] which suggests that in this memorable sketch he sought to merge portrait and genre imagery.

The connections to genre painting are evident in the relationship of the pose of the young man with those of figures in contemporary “merry company” scenes, particularly in the works by Hals’ younger brother Dirck. [5] The National Gallery’s picture is even closer to Dirck’s imagery when one considers the freely executed oil sketches on paper that served as models for figures in such paintings, for example a *Seated Man*, c. 1627, now in Paris (Institut Néerlandais). [6] In another of Dirck’s sketches, *Seated Man with a Pipe*, c. 1627 (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam), the figure leans over exactly the same type of chair as does the young man in the Washington oil sketch. [7] While comparisons with these studies help place *A Young Man in a Large Hat* thematically and chronologically, they also demonstrate the masterful execution of Frans Hals’ Washington panel. By contrast, Dirck never developed the ability to suggest the form of a hand with bold, swelling touches of the brush or to soften the modeling of a face with a sequence of short parallel strokes, effects so brilliantly rendered by his older brother in this work. Here, furthermore, Hals used a wide range of quick notations to animate the costume, from the broad angular strokes of the jacket sleeve to the delicate touches of the brush that indicate the white lace.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, 1627, oil on copper, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie. Photo: bpk, Berlin / Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY

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**NOTES**

[1] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), 375; Harmen, who

was baptized in Haarlem on September 2, 1611, followed in his father's footsteps as a painter, although he inherited none of his father's ability. He was buried in Haarlem on February 15, 1669. Slive has kindly drawn my attention to an unpublished drawing in the Haarlem archives that depicts Harmen Hals later in his life. The facial characteristics seen in the drawing are not unrelated to those in the painting.

- [2] Seymour Slive, ed. *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (London, 1970–1974), 1:124.
- [3] Reproduced in *Frans Halsmuseum Haarlem* (Haarlem, 1969), 69, no. 213b.
- [4] Seymour Slive, ed., *Frans Hals* (Washington, DC, 1989), no. 28, repro.
- [5] Discussed in Picture Gallery Berlin, *Catalogue of Paintings*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin, 1978), 199, no. 816A.
- [6] Collection Lugt, inv. no. 1796.
- [7] Inv. no. 1965:180. See Peter Schatborn, "Olieverfschetsen van Dirck Hals," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 21 (1973): 107–116.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support is a single oak panel with a vertical grain set into a 0.5–centimeter-wide collar of oak that does not appear to be original. Dendrochronology dates the panel to an earliest felling date of 1625, with an estimated date for use of 1629.[1] Both panel and protective collar are beveled along all four edges on the back. A check at the top right corner is the only damage to the support. The ground is a thick white layer that leaves the grain pattern visible and extends to the edge of the original panel in all areas save the lower right corner.

Paint is applied thinly in quick fluid strokes with rounded ends. Highlights are applied thickly, worked wet-into-wet in the thin underlayers. The sketchy nature of the painting is enhanced by some intentional rubbing in of thin paint layers. The painting is in excellent condition, with scattered small losses discretely inpainted. An aged but only slightly discolored varnish layer is present. No major conservation treatment has been carried out since acquisition.

[1] Dendrochronology by Dr. Peter Klein, Ordinariat für Holzbiologie, Universität Hamburg (see report in NGA Conservation department files dated May 1, 1987).

## PROVENANCE

C.J.G. Bredius, Woerden, by 1918.[1] (M. Knoedler & Co., New York and Paris); sold 30 January 1929 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 June 1937 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1940 to NGA.

[1] According to Hans Schneider, "Ein neues Bild von Frans Hals," *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt* 30 (1918-1919), 368, Bredius acquired this sketch for 60 florins as part of an inheritance. The painting was at that time attributed to Jan Miense Molenaer. The attribution to Hals was made by Abraham Bredius, who persuaded his relative to lend the painting for a while to the Mauritshuis. Later references to earlier owners Van der Hoop and Slochteren (see Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols., London and New York, 1970-1974, 3: 41-42, no. 66) cannot be confirmed.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1919 Loan for display with permanent collection, Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1919.

1989 Frans Hals, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, 1989-1990, no. 39 (cat. by Seymour Slive).

1995 Adriaen Brouwer: Youth Making a Face, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1995-1996, not in brochure.

1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 24.

2009 Judith Leyster, 1609-1660, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2009, unnumbered brochure, fig. 6.

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- 1968 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings and Sculpture, Illustrations*. Washington, 1968: 58, repro.
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- 1975 National Gallery of Art. *European paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. Washington, 1975: 170, repro.
- 1975 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. New York, 1975: 268-269, no. 354, repro.
- 1976 Montagni, E.C. *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Frans Hals*. Translated by Simone Darses. *Les classiques de l'art*. Paris, 1976: no. 67, repro.
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- 1985 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*.

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- 1989 Slive, Seymour. *Frans Hals*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem. London, 1989: 244, no. 39, repro.
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- 1998 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *A Collector's Cabinet*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1998: 66, no. 24.
- 2009 Hofrichter, Frima Fox. *Judith Leyster (1609-1660)*. Exh. brochure. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2009: 4, fig. 6.
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