

- 1942 Widener: 6, no. 656.
 1948 Widener: 47, no. 656, repro.
 1953 Simpson: 39–42.
 1954 Münz: 146–147, repro. (also 1984 rev. ed.: 112–113, repro.).
 1965 NGA: 110, no. 656.
 1966 Bauch: 6–7, 44, no. 93, repro.
 1966 Schiller 1: 100 (also 1970 English ed., 1: 90).
 1968 Gerson: 132, 134, 154, 410, 416, repro., 501–502, no. 350.
 1968 NGA: 99, repro.
 1969 Gerson/Bredius: 500, repro., 611, no. 596.
 1969 Washington: no. 22.
 1975 NGA: 286, repro.
 1976 Walker: 282, repro.
 1976 Garlick: 117–124.
 1978 Esteban and Monneret: 112–113, color repro.
 1979 Strauss and Van der Meulen: 480, 499–500.
 1979 Keller: 77–112, color repro.
 1980 Hoekstra: 27, color repro.
 1981 Tümpel: 429–434.
 1984/1985 Schwartz: 324, 330, no. 376, color repro. (also 1985 English ed.).
 1985 NGA: 331, repro.
 1986 Tümpel: 355, 420, no. A12, color repro.
 1986 Guillaud and Guillaud: 554–555, color repro.
 1986 Sutton: 312.
 1987 Fukuoka: no. 11, color repro.
 1988 Pears: 83, repro.

1942.9.69 (665)

Rembrandt van Rijn

Portrait of a Man in a Tall Hat

c. 1663

Oil on canvas, 121.3 x 94 (47¾ x 37)

Widener Collection

Technical Notes: The support is a medium-weight, herringbone-weave fabric consisting of two pieces seamed horizontally at center, 65 cm from the top. The seam protrudes slightly. The support has been double lined using a gauze interleaf visible in x-radiographs, with the tacking margins trimmed. Absence of cusping on all sides suggests reduction of the original dimensions. A pale, smooth ground layer was applied, followed by a thin, black imprimatura overall. A reddish brown underpainting occurs in selected areas such as the face.

Paint was applied as thick pastes with complex layering and lively brushmarking in the features. Brushes and a palette knife were used to apply paint, and lines were incised with the butt end of a brush. The figure was painted after the background. The red paint of the table continues underneath the black cloak. Artist's changes visible in the x-radiograph include the proper left arm, which originally bent sharply at the elbow with the proper left hand holding a glove, appearing at center (see fig. 2). The proper right arm originally extended downward, ending in a hand that grasped some

draped object. White cuffs were eliminated from both sleeves, the left collar tassel was moved to the right, the collar shortened, and the hat slimmed.

Numerous small losses occur in the white collar and scattered minor losses overall. The face is intact save minute flake losses. Severe abrasion in the background and costume has been retouched. Lining has flattened the paint texture overall. A thick, discolored varnish layer obscures the surface. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition by the National Gallery.

Provenance: Ivor Bertie Guest [1st Baron Wimborne, later Lord Wimborne, 1835–1914], Canford Manor, Dorsetshire, by 1883; possibly by inheritance to Ivor Churchill Guest [2nd Baron, 1873–1939], Wimborne, Dorsetshire. (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London); Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania by 1912; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

Exhibited: Washington 1969, no. 21.

THE IDENTITY of this imposing sitter has long been lost, but his dress and demeanor indicate that he was a well-to-do burgher, probably an Amsterdam merchant. The date of the portrait is also unknown, but similarities between this work and Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Cloth Drapers' Guild* of 1662 (fig. 1) suggest that the two paintings are not far removed in date. The sitter's hairstyle and costume, particularly his wide, flat collar with its tassels, are similar, as is the dignity and gravity that he projects as he focuses his eyes on the viewer from beneath his wide-brimmed black hat. Even the herringbone canvases that Rembrandt used for these paintings are comparable.¹

The vigor and surety of Rembrandt's brushwork is particularly evident in the head. He has modeled the man's face with broad strokes heavily loaded with a relatively dry paint. Since it is mixed with little medium, the paint has a broken character that enhances the sitter's rough-hewn features. Stylistically, this manner of execution is broader than that found in the National Gallery's *A Young Man Seated at a Table*, 1660 (1937.1.77), with which it is often compared,² and, to a certain extent, even broader than that of the *Syndics of the Cloth Drapers' Guild*, an evolution of style that suggests a date of execution subsequent to these works, perhaps 1663.

Unfortunately, aside from the well-preserved face and the relative disposition of the figure, it is extremely difficult to make precise assessments about this painting. The basic problem is that the original character of the painting has been distorted through flattening, abrasion, and discolored varnish.³ Infrared examination reveals that extensive abrasion in the reddish brown background has been heavily restored. The degree to which the massive



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Man in a Tall Hat*, 1642.9.69

black form of the man's robes has been damaged by abrasion and/or reworking, however, cannot be determined. Presumably, this illegible mass once had some definition of form that would have related to the three-dimensionality of the man's body.

The issue about the condition of the robe is of some consequence because x-radiographs reveal significant pentimenti in the figure's body. Rembrandt had originally depicted the gentleman with an even longer collar and with his hands in quite different positions. The sitter initially held his left hand higher, at waist level (fig. 2). His cuff was visible and he held a pair of gloves. The other hand is harder to read, but it appears as though it extended downward before him, perhaps resting on or holding some object. To judge from the x-radiograph these hands were fully modeled. Sharp ridges of lead white paint along their forms indicate that Rembrandt used a palette knife in creating them, a technique not otherwise evident in this painting, but one that Rembrandt began exploiting during the mid-1660s.⁴

As is also clear from the x-radiograph, the different placement of the hands affected the position of the arms. As a result the contour of the body is now much larger than it was originally. It may well be that the sitter did not initially have a cloak draped over his shoulders. X-radiographs also indicate that the crown of the hat was slightly smaller and was silhouetted against a lighter background than at present. At the time that the composition was changed, it is likely that the dimensions of the painting were also reduced.⁵

These changes may have been undertaken to give the sitter a greater presence and added austerity. Moreover, by minimizing the activity of the hands, the head received added emphasis. Unfortunately, in its present appearance, large portions of the figure are without visual interest. Because of the thick layers of discolored varnish, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the lack of modeling in the robes results from the condition of the painting or the quality of the artistic representation. One should not exclude the possibility that someone other than Rembrandt made these changes. In the hands, the only area of the body that can be seen properly, the evidence is not conclusive. The portrayal of the right hand is particularly unsuccessful, and the arm of the chair floats disconcertingly in the midst of the robes surrounding it.⁶ Nevertheless, the sitter's left hand is firmly modeled in a manner not unlike that of the face, so an ultimate judgment as to who executed these changes of composition must be reserved until the painting is restored.

Notes

1. Rembrandt used herringbone canvas in a number of paintings from the 1660s, including the *Claudius Civilis* (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), *Family Portrait* (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig), *Man with a Magnifying Glass*, and *Woman Holding a Pink* (both Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). See also discussion of pendants, 1942.9.67 and 1942.9.68.

2. Bode 1897–1906, 7: 3.

3. See Technical Notes.

4. See the discussion of Rembrandt's *Lucretia* (1937.1.76).

5. No thread distortions are found along any edge, which is evidence that the painting was once larger on all sides. It is rather unusual for a portrait of this size to have a horizontal seam, a fact that may indicate that the painting was initially quite a bit larger. The *Syndics of the Cloth Drapers' Guild* has a similar construction (its dimensions are 191.5 x 279 cm).

6. This area is so confusing that Bode thought that the sitter was holding a letter (Bode 1897–1906, 7: 36, no. 487). He titled the painting *Portrait of a Man in a High Hat Holding a Letter in His Right Hand*. This same reading was continued in Widener 1913–1916; HdG 1907–1927, 6: 365, no. 781; and Widener 1923.

References

- 1883 Bode: 530, 579–580, no. 148.
 1885 Dutuit: 49.
 1893 Michel: [1894 English trans. 2 vols., 2: 237].
 1897–1906 Bode, 7 (1902): 3, 36–37, no. 487, repro.
 1899 Bell: 140 (also 1907 ed.: 124).
 1906 Rosenberg: 368, repro. (also 1908 ed.: 500, repro.).
 1907–1927 HdG, 6 (1916): 365, no. 781.
 1913–1916 Widener: intro., repro.
 1914 Valentiner: 249, no. 88.
 1921b Valentiner: 500, repro.
 1923 Meldrum: 203, no. 431, repro., 431.
 1923 Widener: unpaginated, repro.
 1931 Widener: 66–67, repro.
 1931 Valentiner: intro., no. 160, repro.
 1932 Hind: 89.
 1935 Bredius: 14, 313, repro. (also 1936 English ed.: 13, 313, repro.).
 1935 Tietze: (1939 English ed.) 167 repro., 320, no. 167.
 1942 Widener: 6, no. 665.
 1948 Widener: 45, repro.
 1965 NGA: 111, no. 665.
 1966 Bauch: 23, no. 437, 437, repro.
 1968 NGA: 97, no. 665, repro.
 1968 Gerson: 442, repro., 504, no. 401.
 1969 Gerson/Bredius: 241, repro., 574, no. 313.
 1969 Washington: no. 21.
 1975 NGA: 290–291, repro.
 1977 Bolten and Bolten-Rempt: 202, no. 546, repro.
 1984/1985 Schwartz: 338, no. 395, color repro.
 1986 Tümpel: 324–325, color repro., 413, no. 219.
 1990 The Hague: 391, repro.



Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn,
Syndics of the Drapers' Guild, 1662,
oil on canvas, Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum



Fig. 2. X-radiograph of
1942.9.69