



THE LEIDEN
COLLECTION





Bust of a Bearded Old Man

Rembrandt van Rijn
(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

1633

oil on paper, mounted on panel

10.6 x 7.3 cm

signed and dated along top: “Rembrandt 1633”

RR-116

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Situated close to the picture plane, head turned sharply and eyes cast downward, the elderly man depicted in Rembrandt's small, monochromatic oil sketch pulsates with life. With his lips slightly parted and his body seeming to rise with a passing breath, he occupies a world that is nearly the viewer's own. Rembrandt's vigorous brushstrokes animate the sitter's psychological being and physical presence, making this bust-length image seem far larger than it is in reality. Light streaming in from the upper left falls on the right side of the elderly man's face and models his three-dimensional form. His eyes are open and alert as they focus intensely upon something beyond the composition. Rembrandt emphasized the sitter's emotional energy through the rhythmic interplay of grays and browns, adding ochre and white accents that appear on the subject's wiry beard and the curly hair tumbling over his forehead. Both delicate and powerful, *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* encapsulates the profound humanity of Rembrandt's finest works.

Bust of a Bearded Old Man is Rembrandt's smallest known painting, and the only grisaille by the artist in private hands.^[1] The deep resonance it carries for the beholder arises from an extraordinary paradox: its size—it fits in the palm of one's hand—belies its monumentality. As Wilhelm Martin, who was then director of the Mauritshuis, noted in 1923, all of Rembrandt's "prodigious virtuosity" is found in the power of the bearded man's face.^[2] The painting was at that point in the collection of Baron Leon Janssen in Brussels, but Martin would not forget it, and when the painting was auctioned in 1927 after the Baron's death, the Mauritshuis actively sought to acquire it. The museum, however, was outbid by Knoedler's, which immediately offered the painting to Andrew W. Mellon, noting in its letter to Mellon, "This is considered by the greatest connoisseurs of Rembrandt as one of his greatest gems."^[3]

Rembrandt's interest in depicting the physical and psychological character of aging men and women emerged in the late 1620s, when he was a young artist in Leiden, and continued unabated throughout his life. The elderly, whether family members, models in his studio, or random figures he encountered conversing on street corners, clearly fascinated Rembrandt for their expressive physical qualities and underlying humanity.^[4] He made individual character studies, or *tronies*, of the elderly in drawings, etchings, and paintings, and these works often served as inspiration for figures in his biblical and mythological scenes.^[5]

Rembrandt painted *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* in 1633, shortly after he had settled in Amsterdam, revisiting—and in many ways reinventing—a figural type that had preoccupied him when he was in Leiden. In a group of drawings and etchings that he executed in 1630 and 1631, Rembrandt depicted an elderly man with a thick, wiry beard, large forehead, and distinctive features.^[6] A core image from this group is a

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Old Man Seated with Folded Hands*, ca. 1631, black and red chalk on reddish-yellow washed paper, incised, 226 x 157 mm, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany, inv. no. KDZ 1151, bpk Bildagentur / Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen / Art Resource, NY.



Fig 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Old Man with Beard Facing Downwards, Three Quarters, to the Right*, 1631, etching with annotations in pen, 120 x 118 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1959-667.

red-chalk drawing of the figure seen full length and gazing downward as he sits in an armchair with hands folded in his lap (fig 1).^[7] The drawing is a masterly depiction of mood, not only because of the elderly man's reflective pose but also because of the strong contrasts of light and shade that play out in rich variations of red chalk. The related etchings that Rembrandt made in 1630–31 are bust-length images that focus on the bearded man's head and upper body (fig 2).^[8] In each of these etchings, Rembrandt subtly varied the man's pose by changing the angle of his head and altering the length and texture of his beard. The loose and fluid lines of the etching needle enhance the plasticity of the figure. Most importantly, Rembrandt adjusted the intensity and focus of his chiaroscuro effects to convey a different psychological state of mind in each of the etchings.^[9]

Bust of a Bearded Old Man transcends Rembrandt's depictions of the elderly man seen in the earlier etchings. Boldly executed, the figure in this oil sketch fills the composition, his darkened forearm extending beyond the picture plane. The man's physical appearance is also somewhat different, as curly hair now falls over his wrinkled forehead, visually evoking his active mind and emotional energy. Rembrandt created this *tronie* with great assuredness and seeming speed, laying out the entire composition *alla prima* and making no changes during the painting process.^[10] He exploited the physical characteristics of paint, oscillating between controlled refinement and loose, textured bravura. For example, while thick, fluid strokes define the man's sleeve, the ground layer remains visible in other parts of his robe and hair. It is unlikely, however, that Rembrandt painted this image directly from life (*naar het leven*). His adaptation of a figural motif developed in Leiden suggests that he rendered it *uit den gheest*, or from his imagination, nevertheless imbuing it with the sensitivity and immediacy of a life study.^[11]

Scholars have consistently remarked on the extraordinary character of *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, although the small size of this grisaille oil sketch and its unusual support—paper mounted on panel—have elicited a number of differing opinions about its original function.^[12] In 1968, Horst Gerson suggested that the painting represented “a fragment of a grisaille sketch,” but the integrity of the composition as a whole and its “self-contained” nature argue otherwise.^[13] The bold black lines that surround the composition, which act as a kind of framing device, as well as the brushstrokes that extend confidently along the edges of the paper, indicate that the painting has not been reduced in size.^[14]

In the 1980s, Bob Haak and Josua Bruyn, members of the Rembrandt Research Project, suggested that, because of its size and paper support, *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* may have been intended as a preparatory oil sketch, or *modello*, for an etching or engraving.^[15] The limited tones of blacks, whites, and grays in grisaille were



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Ecce Homo*, 1634, oil on paper mounted onto canvas, 54.4 x 44.5 cm, National Gallery, London, bought 1894, inv. no. NG1400, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY.



Fig 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, Drawing from *Album amicorum II van Burchard Grossman*, 1634, pen and brown ink with wash, 89 x 71 mm, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.



Fig 5. Rembrandt van Rijn's *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, 1633, displayed in a velvet travel box commissioned by Andrew Mellon.

beneficial for working out the design of a print, particularly in the depiction of light and shadow.^[16] Artists and printmakers employed this practice regularly in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Rembrandt himself used it on at least one occasion. The *Ecce Homo* from 1634 (**fig 3**), which he executed in grisaille, was transferred directly onto an etching plate.^[17] Rembrandt produced several other grisaille sketches in the mid-1630s, including *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, 1634 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), but it is unclear whether they were also designs intended for prints, as no corresponding etchings for any of them survive.^[18] The narrative subject matter, multifigural composition, and coarse handling of these grisailles, however, share little with the character of *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, whose powerful ability to move the viewer—in its painterly technique and emotional spirit—suggests that Rembrandt intended it as an independent work of art.^[19]

Haak and Bruyn also proposed that Rembrandt may have painted *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* for an *album amicorum*, or friendship album.^[20] They suggested that this context could explain the painting's large signature and date, and paper support.^[21] Their point of reference was a pen-and-wash drawing of an old man that Rembrandt executed for the *Album amicorum II van Burchard Grossmann* in 1634 (**fig 4**).^[22] Depicted half length and in three-quarter view, the drawing of a bearded man, with his head turned and his left arm placed prominently in the foreground, bears a number of similarities to *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*. Yet this delicate drawing, which is accompanied by a moralizing inscription, has an entirely different character than the oil sketch in The Leiden Collection.^[23] Moreover, as Albert Blankert has rightly argued, the physical character of an oil painting, particularly in a work painted with this rich impasto, makes it unlikely that it was intended for the pages of an *album amicorum*.^[24]

The confident, self-contained nature of *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* argues strongly that Rembrandt painted this remarkable oil sketch as an independent work of art. Intimately connected to his ongoing interest in depicting reflective, elderly men, the painting is one of Rembrandt's most compelling explorations of the physical and psychological character of such figures. By executing this study in grisaille, Rembrandt captured subtleties of form, light, and shade in unparalleled ways, evoking the inner life and individuality of this expressive sitter. *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* is exceptional for its visual power and masterly technique, and for the way it allows the viewer to look closely and reflect deeply about the human emotions so poignantly captured in this small masterpiece.

Bust of a Bearded Old Man carries an illustrious provenance that stretches back to the late eighteenth century. One of its most important owners was Andrew W. Mellon, who acquired the painting from Knoedler's in 1928, and it immediately became one



of the jewels of his collection.^[25] Mellon had a special velvet-encased travel box made for the painting, which still exists (**fig 5**). It is rumored that he carried the work with him everywhere he went and otherwise displayed it on his desk. *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* captivated the present collector over fifteen years ago when he first saw it in an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,^[26] and, like Wilhelm Martin, he never forgot it. He was finally able to acquire it in 2018, and this small gem is now one of the pinnacles of The Leiden Collection's extensive assemblage of works by Rembrandt.

- Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 2019

Endnotes

1. For a discussion of Rembrandt's other works in grisaille, see below.
2. Wilhelm Martin described the painting in the collection of Baron Janssen in Brussels in 1923 as "toute la prodigieuse virtuosité du maître se trahit dans cette tête puissante." Wilhelm Martin, *Catalogue de la Collection de Peintures du Baron Janssen a Bruxelles* (Brussels, 1923), no. 94.
3. The letter continues, "It is the smallest painting by the artist to exist and has a very distinguished pedigree, which will be sent to you when we render our bill in due course. It is a unique little picture of the very highest possible quality—signed and dated. The great Museum who were the under-bidders own twenty of the finest works in existence by the Master, which will give you an idea how much they prize this little gem." The letter, dated June 8, 1928, was written by Carman H. Messmore, who was then an art dealer with Knoedler & Co. GRI Digital Collections, M. Knoedler & Co., Letter copying book: Domestic letters, 1928 May 22–1928 September 7, leaf 170, <http://hdl.handle.net/10020/2012m54b1434> (accessed January 11, 2019).
4. See, for example, Christiaan Vogelaar and Gerbrand Korevaar, eds., *Rembrandt's Mother: Myth and Reality* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) (Leiden, 2005).
5. See, for example, *Two Old Men Disputing*, 1628 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne); *Head of an Old Man Wearing a Cap*, ca. 1630 (Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston); and *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*, 1630 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Rembrandt shared this interest with Jan Lievens; see, for instance, Lievens's *Bearded Man in a Beret*, ca. 1630 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).
6. For the etchings, see discussion below. For Rembrandt's drawings of old men in red chalk, see Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 1: no. 20, fig. 20, no. 40, fig. 40, no. 41, fig. 50; Martin Royalton-Kisch, "The Drawings of Rembrandt: A Revision of Otto Benesch's Catalogue Raisonné," www.rembrandtcatalogue.net. For further discussion, see Holm Bevers, Peter Schatborn, and Barbara Welzel, *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop: Drawings and Etchings* (Exh. cat. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Altes Museum; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; London, National Gallery) (New Haven, 1991), 26–28.
7. The related red-chalk drawings of this figure study are *Old Man Seated*, 1630 (Private Collection) and *Seated Old Man*, 1631 (Teylers Museum, Haarlem). There is also a bust-length version in profile, *Old Man Seated*, 1630 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).
8. Rembrandt made four etchings of this subject: *Old Man with a Flowing Beard*, B.309, 1630; *Bust of an Old Man with a Flowing Beard*, B.325, 1630; *Old Man with Beard Facing Downwards, Three Quarters, to the Right*, B.260, 1631 (see fig. 2); *Bust of an Old Man with a Flowing Beard*, B.291, ca. 1630.
9. In the first state of one of these etchings (see fig. 2), Rembrandt made corrections in pen and brown ink along the folds of the figure's arm and robe that are reminiscent of accents that he would develop more

fully in the painted study. This etching was illustrated in reverse in Josua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2: 1631–1634, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), 2: no. A74, in order to draw attention to its close relationship with *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*. I.Q. van Regteren Altena made the attribution of the corrections in pen and ink to Rembrandt in the *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 9 (1961): 3–10. For an overview of Rembrandt's head studies from around 1630, see Thomas E. Rassieur, "Head Studies and Fantasy Portraits," in *Rembrandt's Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher*, ed. Clifford Ackley (Exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) (Boston, 2004), 92–100.

10. These observations were made by Kristin deGhetaldi after physical examination and technical imaging of the painting. See Technical Summary.
11. The painting's lifelike manner demonstrates Rembrandt's powerful ability to coalesce the artistic traditions of working *naar het leven* and *uit den gheest*. For a discussion of some of these ideas in an artist's working practices in this period, see William W. Robinson and Peter Schatborn, "Drawing into Painting: An Overview," in *Drawings for Paintings in the Age of Rembrandt*, eds. Ger Luijten, Peter Schatborn, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Paris, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt) (Milan, 2016), 5–16.
12. It is not clear when the paper was mounted to panel, and whether this was done in Rembrandt's workshop, by the artist himself, or at a later stage. Recent X-ray images reveal woodworm tunnels on both the front and back of the panel, suggesting that the paper was adhered to the panel at a later point (after previous use) and then subsequently cradled (see Technical Summary). The practice of mounting paper onto a wooden or canvas support occurred in a number of Rembrandt's works from this period: *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, 1633–34, oil on paper laid on cardboard (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); *Ecce Homo*, 1634, oil on paper, stuck on canvas (National Gallery, London); *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, ca. 1635, oil on paper and canvas, mounted on panel (National Gallery, London).
13. Gerson related *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* to Rembrandt's "powerful" drawings of the 1630s, such as *Christ and His Disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane*, 1634 (Teylers Museum, Haarlem). He called the signature on *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* "spurious," though he believed the date to be in seventeenth-century script. Scholars have largely dismissed Gerson's interpretation; the Rembrandt Research Project described the painting as a "self-contained work." The RRP also considered the signature and date to be authentic. The recent cleaning of *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* confirmed that the signature and date are intact. See Horst Gerson, *Rembrandt: Paintings* (Amsterdam, 1968), no. 183; Josua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2: 1631–1634, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), 2: 353.
14. There is no indication that the black framing lines were added later, and the lack of detail visible beneath them, as seen in the infrared image, suggests that Rembrandt may have originally painted them himself. Similar black framing lines appear in *The Lamentation at the Foot of the Cross*, ca. 1634–35 (British Museum, London), a drawing that was executed in pen and brown ink and brown wash, with red and perhaps black chalk, and reworked in oils in grisaille. This drawing is closely related to *The*

Lamentation over the Dead Christ, ca. 1635 (National Gallery, London). For further discussion of the British Museum drawing and its relation to the National Gallery grisaille painting, see David Bomford et al., *Art in the Making: Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery) (London, 2006), 100–109; Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and His School* (London, 2010), cat. no. 9. The application of the gray paint in the background of *Bust of a Bearded Old Man* has also been done with careful intentionality; certain areas around the contours of the figure indicate that Rembrandt went back over the composition after he had already completed the figure.

15. Josua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2, 1631–1634, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), 353. This idea was more or less dismissed in the entry itself, but has remained a possibility noted in the scholarship. See, for example, Leonard Slatkes, *Rembrandt: Catalogo complete dei dipini* (Florence, 1992), no. 213.
16. For an overview of grisaille in Rembrandt's oeuvre, see Ronni Baer, "Rembrandt's Oil Sketches," in *Rembrandt's Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher*, ed. Clifford Ackley (Exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) (Boston, 2004), 32–33.
17. The *Ecce Homo* grisaille was used for an etching in 1635/36 (B.77). When the print is examined in raking light, it is evident that many of the outlines of the composition have been indented with a stylus in the process of transferring the design to the etching plate. This is the only known evidence of this process occurring in Rembrandt's work. See David Bomford et al., *Art in the Making: Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery) (London, 2006), 75–81.
18. *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, 1633 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) may have served as a preparatory sketch for a print, but there is no physical evidence that such a practice was carried out. A smaller etching of the subject, likely based on the grisaille sketch, appeared in 1638 (*Joseph Telling His Dreams*, etching, B.37). The figure of Jacob in *Joseph Telling His Dreams* is based on one of the red-chalk figure studies that Rembrandt made in Leiden in 1631 (Private Collection). See Clifford Ackley, *Rembrandt's Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher* (Exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) (Boston, 2004), 118–22; Ger Luijten, Peter Schatborn, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., eds., *Drawings for Paintings in the Age of Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Paris, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt) (Milan, 2016), 158–59.
19. *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, and *Ecce Homo* form part of a group of grisaille paintings Rembrandt produced between 1633 and 1635, along with *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, 1634 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin); *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, ca. 1635 (National Gallery, London); *The Entombment*, ca. 1630s (Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow); and *Concord of the State*, 1635–40 (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam). Various arguments have been put forth as to the context of and intention for these grisaille oil sketches—particularly whether they were intended as preparatory designs for prints, like the *Ecce Homo*—but, as noted above, there is no evidence that Rembrandt ever used this practice again. A number of other Dutch and Flemish artists, such as Otto van Veen, Peter Paul Rubens, Hendrick Goltzius, Abraham Bloemaert, Pieter Lastman, and Jan Lievens, worked in grisaille at various points of their careers. Among those known especially for



working in grisaille was Adriaen van de Venne. For discussion and further references on this subject, see, for instance, Ronni Baer, “Rembrandt’s Oil Sketches,” in *Rembrandt’s Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher*, ed. Clifford Ackley (Exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) (Boston, 2004), 29–44.

20. Josua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2: 1631–1634, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), 353.
21. Ernst van de Wetering upholds this theory in Corpus VI, arguing that the work’s original placement in an *album amicorum* is a likely explanation for the large signature and date. Ernst van de Wetering et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 6: *Rembrandt’s Paintings Revisited: A Complete Survey*, with collaboration of Carin van Nes, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (Dordrecht, 2014), 6: no. 103, 529.
22. See Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 111, no. 1634/6.
23. The inscription reads: “Een vroom gemoet / Acht eer voor goet” (An upright soul prizes honor above wealth).
24. Albert Blankert, *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* (Exh. cat. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria; Canberra, National Gallery of Australia) (Zwolle, 1997–98), 115.
25. See Provenance.
26. Clifford Ackley, ed., *Rembrandt’s Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher* (Exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) (Boston, 2004).

Provenance

- Possibly Mrs. Van Sonsbeeck, before 1751.
- Frédéric Szarvady (d. 1882), Paris (his sale, Hotel Drouot, Paris, 21 February 1874, no. 39 [for 2500 francs]).
- V. Borie, Paris, 1881.
- Private collection, Paris, 1900 [to F. Kleinberger Galleries].
- [F. Kleinberger Galleries, Paris, 1900 (to Baron Léon Janssen)].
- Baron Léon Janssen (1849–1923), Brussels, by 1905 (his sale, Frederik Muller & Cie, Amsterdam, 26 April 1927, no. 94 [to M. Knoedler & Co. for 35,200 florins]).^[1]
- [M. Knoedler & Co., New York (to Andrew W. Mellon for \$18,000)].
- Andrew W. Mellon (1855–1937), Washington, D.C., 1928; by descent to his son Paul Mellon (1907–99) (to Arthur Amory Houghton Jr.).



- Arthur Amory Houghton Jr. (1906–90), New York and Queenstown, M.D., by 1955 [through Richard L. Feigen & Co., New York (to Saul P. Steinberg)].
- Saul P. Steinberg (1939–2012), New York, 1984 (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 30 January 1997, no. 39 [to private collection, Tokyo and London]).^[2]
- Private collection, Tokyo and London.
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2018.

Provenance Notes

1. Jan Steen's *Tooth-Puller*, now in The Leiden Collection, was also formerly in the collection of Baron Léon Janssen.
2. Frans van Mieris's *Death of Lucretia*, now in The Leiden Collection, was also formerly in the collection of Saul P. Steinberg.

Exhibition History

- Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, "Rembrandt-hulde te Leiden," 15 July–15 September 1906, no. 51 [lent by Baron Léon Janssen].
- Brussels, "International Exhibition of Miniatures," 1912, no. 1046 [lent by Baron Léon Janssen].
- The Hague, Koninklijke Kunstzaal Kleykamp, "Tentoonstelling van schilderijen door oud-hollandsche en vlaamsche meesters," 1927, no. 32 [lent by Baron Léon Janssen].
- New York, National Academy of Design, "Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Private Collections," 1988–89, no. 38 [lent by Saul P. Steinberg].
- Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, "Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact," 1 October–7 December 1997; Canberra, National Gallery of Australia, 17 December 1997–15 February 1998, no. 9 [lent by private collection].
- Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, "Rembrandt's Journey: Painter, Draftsman, Etcher," 26 October 2003–18 January 2004; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, 14 February–9 May 2004, no. 31 [lent by private collection].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre," 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, "Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 8 [lent by the present owner].

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Versions

Version

1. After Rembrandt, *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, n.d., dimensions and medium unknown, current whereabouts unknown.^[1]

Versions Notes

1. Photograph in the Photo Archives, RKD, The Hague.

Technical Summary

The paper support has been adhered to a cradled wooden panel of considerable age (presumably oak).^[1] The small size of the oil sketch is exceptional, as is its finished appearance, a characteristic that sets this work apart from other grisailles dating to this period.^[2] The sketch reveals an exceptional degree of confidence in the handling of paint, particularly in the strokes used to depict the hair, beard, and clothing.

Examination with X-radiography, infrared photography, and infrared reflectography did not reveal any distinctive changes to the composition.^[3] Before the preliminary painted sketch was executed, the paper support was given a warm tone with a fluid, dark brown paint. The figure was then quickly and confidently painted with browns, yellows, white, and black; the mouth was formed by applying a tiny, singular daub of red lake. A similarly muted palette was used to further refine and develop areas of the drapery, the face, and the hair. Paint was applied both wet-over-dry and wet-into-wet.

The background has an overall green-gray tone, which was also used to refine the contours of the figure. Final details were applied to the hair and beard. To establish the final format of the composition, the artist applied black outlines along the outer edges of the painting.^[4]

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint along the upper edge.



The work was conserved in 2018 and is in excellent and stable condition.

Further technical information about this artwork is available in The Rembrandt Database.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. X-radiography revealed the presence of woodworm tunnels that were filled from the front of the panel, indicating that the front and back of the panel had been filled before the paper support was adhered to the surface. It is not clear when this process occurred, and further research is needed to determine the dating of the panel. In addition, cradling was not frequently performed on wooden supports until the late eighteenth century. See Paul Ackroyd, "The Structural Conservation of Paintings on Wooden Panel Supports," in *The Conservation Easel Paintings*, ed. Joyce Hill Stoner and Rebecca Anne Rushfield (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 459.
2. Three comparable works on paper include the *Lamentation at the Foot of the Cross*, c. 1634–35 (British Museum, London), *Ecce Homo*, 1634 (National Gallery, London), and *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, 1633 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). I am grateful to curator Lara Yeager-Crasselt at The Leiden Collection and independent researcher Maaïke Dirx for providing me with these examples.
3. All imaging was carried out at Winterthur Museum in Winterthur, Delaware. X-radiography was collected using a Pantak-Seifert Eresco 65 MF2 equipped with a GE CR50P Phosphor scanner (scans are collected with GE Rhythm RT software and processed with GE Rhythm Review software). Infrared reflectography was performed using an FLIR-Alpha NIR camera equipped with an InGaAs detector and various filters (incandescent lighting source) that allow for sensitivity within the 900 to 1700 nanometer range. Infrared photography was performed using a CCD detector (modified Nikon camera) that is sensitive within the 750 to 1050 nanometer range. I would like to thank paintings conservator Matthew Cushman, photographer Jim Schenck, and WUDPAC painting conservation students Tracy Liu, Julianna Ly, and Jennifer Myers for their assistance throughout the imaging process.
4. The dark black outline along the outer edges of the composition is a curious feature of the painting. This line is not present along most of the proper right edge but is relatively consistent in thickness along the top and proper left edges. Along the bottom edge the black line is the most prominent, measuring approximately .48 cm (3/16 inches) thick. The black paint does not extend over the outer edges of the panel.