



Jan Lievens
Dutch, 1607 - 1674

Bearded Man with a Beret

c. 1630

oil on panel

overall: 53.5 x 46.3 cm (21 1/16 x 18 1/4 in.)

Gift of George M. and Linda H. Kaufman 2006.172.1

ENTRY

This old man's aged face, with its irregular features, is alive with emotion as he gazes upward toward the left, his mouth partially open. Light caresses his face, articulating the wrinkled skin of his furrowed brow and glinting off his eyes.[1] Rhythmic strands of hair from his full, flowing beard and moustache further enliven the image. Lievens painted this memorable work in Leiden, at a time when he and Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669) were establishing themselves as two of the finest young artists in the Netherlands. They shared an interest in the depiction of *tronies*, or head and shoulder studies of young and old individuals.[2] *Tronies* were character studies rather than portraits of specific people, and these two artists painted them to evoke a wide range of human emotions. Sometimes these works served as models for larger-scale paintings, but more often they seem to have been created, and valued, as independent works of art.[3]

Lievens painted, drew, and etched numerous *tronies* during the late 1620s and early 1630s. He was particularly gifted in this type of work and knew how to exploit his painting techniques to enhance the animated character of a sitter's appearance. As in this instance, he indicated the transparency of the elderly man's skin with thin glazing, while suggesting the roughness of its texture by applying thick impastos with quick strokes of the brush. He also knew how to articulate the hairs in the man's beard and moustache by scratching through white impastos with the blunt end of his brush.[4] On the other hand, he could paint very broadly, as seen in the gray jacket and beret, which he executed with broad, smooth strokes to provide a subdued but solid visual framework for the focus of the painting, the man's expressive face.

A contemporary observer would have seen the beret as an outmoded hat style, found primarily in scholarly dress.[5] The beret thus would have enhanced the “thoughtful” disposition of the man’s expression—the mien of someone who reflects on the world he sees around him. Both Lievens and Rembrandt found that with age came a remarkable sense of character, not only through the creases that line a wizened face, but also in the inner wisdom of one who has experienced the vagaries of life.[6]

Lievens’ *tronies* were highly regarded by his contemporaries. In his autobiographical account of 1629–1631, Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) wrote that “in painting the human countenance [Lievens] wreaks miracles.”[7] Huygens also noted that a number of prominent collectors had already acquired examples of such head studies (“works of inestimable value and unrivaled artistry”), including the stadtholder, Prince Frederik Hendrik; his treasurer, Thomas Brouart; the artist Jacques de Gheyn III (Dutch, c. 1596 - 1641); and the Amsterdam tax collector Nicolaas Sohier.[8] Unfortunately, the name of the collector who was the first owner of this remarkable image is not known.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

NOTES

- [1] I would like to thank Virginia Treanor for her assistance in writing this entry.
- [2] See Dagmar Hirshfelder, *Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2008).
- [3] For the connections between one of Lievens’ *tronies* and two of his large compositions in which the same figure appears, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Washington, DC, 2008), nos. 38, 40, 41.
- [4] Rembrandt also used this scratching technique in about 1630 on comparable *tronies* of old men.
- [5] Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt’s Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 166.
- [6] In many of their images, perhaps in this instance as well, they used the same model.
- [7] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*

(Washington, DC, 2008), 287.

[8] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Washington, DC, 2008), 287.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on an oak^[1] panel composed of two vertically grained planks. The planks vary in thickness slightly, and the reverse of the panel is beveled. There are two very thin ground layers: a red one on top of a white one.^[2] Infrared reflectography at 1.5 to 1.8 microns^[3] and examination with a stereomicroscope revealed that the artist had laid in the basic composition with a brushy sketch in fluid brown paint. The sketch was allowed to show through the paint in places. The final image was executed with rich paint that was blended and smudged using both brushes and fingers. The paint in the sitter's face was applied wet-into-wet with some impasto in the highlights. The artist dragged the back end of his brush through the wet paint and in some places even the ground to create the highlights in the sitter's hair, beard, and eyebrows. Artist's changes are visible in the contours of the figure and at the junction of his hair and face.

The painting is in very good condition. A fine craquelure pattern can be seen in the brown sketch paint. The varnish is slightly uneven in gloss. No conservation treatment has been undertaken since its acquisition.

[1] The characterization of the wood as oak is based on visual observation only.

[2] The two ground layers were confirmed by cross-sections taken by the NGA Scientific Research department (see report dated March 20, 2007, in NGA Conservation department files).

[3] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

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

Estate of Marion Louise Nichols, Cambridge, Massachusetts;[1] private collection, Boston, from 1975; consigned by (Michael Filades, Boston) to (Hoogsteder-Naumann, Ltd., New York);[2] sold 6 June 1986 to George M. and Linda H. Kaufman, Norfolk; transferred 31 August 2005 to the Kaufman Americana Foundation; gift 2006 to NGA.

[1] According to information provided by Otto Naumann to the Kaufmans (copy in NGA curatorial files), Marion Louise Nichols inherited the painting from her father, who presumably brought it to the United States in the early twentieth century.

[2] Otto Nauman, e-mail to Jennifer Henel, 30 August 2011, in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1990 Great Dutch Paintings from America, Mauritshuis, The Hague; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1990-1991, no. 39, repro.

2008 Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Milwaukee Art Museum; Museum Het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam, 2008-2009, no. 20, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1983 Sumowski, Werner. *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*. 6 vols. Landau, 1983: 3:no. 1253, repro.
- 1990 Broos, Ben P. J., ed. *Great Dutch Paintings from America*. Exh. cat. Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The Hague and Zwolle, 1990: 318-321, no. 39, color repro. 219.
- 2008 Doyle, Margaret. *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*. Exh. brochure. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2008: unpaginated, fig. 2.
- 2008 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Jan Lievens: a Dutch master rediscovered*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Museum Het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam; Milwaukee Art Museum. New Haven, 2008: no. 20, 120-121.

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Jan Lievens/*Bearded Man with a Beret*/c. 1630,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/131993> (accessed April 24, 2014).