THE LIMNER COMPANY



DUTCH SCHOOL (17th Century)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman with brown hair in a lovelock on his left, wearing a falling white ruff and a cream doublet with blue embroidered panels

Circa: 1624

1624

Oil on metal

Oval, 44 mm. (1 ¾ in.) high

Inscribed ‘ANO 1624’ on the surface

Set within contemporary reeded tortoiseshell frame applied with silver finials, convex glass

While the gentleman here has not been identified, much can be deduced about him and the portrait itself by taking a closer look.

The miniature can be attributed to the seventeenth-century Dutch School on the basis of the sitter’s appearance, the medium used, and the artist’s handling of colour and rendering of the face. While the general components of the gentleman’s costume appear Dutch in character, it must be noted that England had adopted many Dutch fashions at the time, including lace collars and ruffs, and “Van Dyke” style facial hair. Therefore, costume alone does not denote Dutch workmanship. The materials used to execute the portrait do however suggest Dutch origins, as oil on metal was decidedly more common in this region than watercolour on vellum, the preferred medium of the English. The palette is relatively neutral compared to the bright jewel tones used by English contemporaries like Peter Oliver (1584-1647), in line with Dutch tendencies. The depth of the portrait, both physical and psychological, also fits with Dutch practice. While English artists at this time typically used a flat light to portray subjects in almost an iconic manner, the Dutch modelled the face more three-dimensionally, highlighting features that might have been smoothed out or excluded by the English. For example, the shadows around this gentleman’s eyes, nose, and mouth, as well as the colour in his cheeks bring the sitter to life instead of creating a static symbol beyond our reach. The artist’s dynamic rendering of the sitter grants the viewer emotional access that is forgone in more stylised English portraits.

Our gentleman wears a lovelock over his left shoulder, signifying romantic devotion to a lover, presumably his wife.[1] This French hairstyle was popular from 1590 until about 1650, but it was primarily fashionable in England, France, and Germany. Lovelocks are rare in portraits of Dutchmen from this period,[2] perhaps due to the polarising discourse surrounding them, both in Holland and England,[3] and it is possible that the sitter in this portrait was an Englishman, painted by a visiting Dutch artist. Some of the derision they provoked came from the inherent clashing of the perceived excess and vanity of this hairstyle with the Calvinist morality that gripped seventeenth century Holland. This resulted in some scathing satirical critiques of lovelocks and other supposedly 'Indecent' or 'Offensive' hairstyles including the sixty-three page English essay *The unlovelinesse of LoveLockes* by William Prynne from 1628 and the 1635 Dutch essay *Encomium Calvitii; Lof der Kaalkoppen* ("Praise of Baldness" or "Praise of the Baldheads" in Latin and Dutch respectively) by Elias Herckmans.[4]

While virtually absent from full-scale Dutch portraiture, perhaps lovelocks found a place in portrait miniatures due to their intimate sentiments.[5] Miniatures were frequently personal gifts intended for loved ones, as a way to keep friends, family, and, very often, spouses close to the wearer. Therefore, the inclusion of a lovelock in this portrait points to the sitter's dedication to his wife, perhaps the recipient of this portrait. Moreover, bold fashion statements are not excluded from portrait miniatures the way they are from full-scale portraiture. Fleeting trends and more daring choices in costume are often immortalised in miniature when they fail to survive elsewhere. The lovelock here may very well be an example of this.

Like the lovelock, the ruff found both acceptance and resistance in Holland and abroad.[6] In response to criticism of the presumed self-obsession associated with the tedious preparation of a tall, starched ruff, lower-maintenance varieties emerged in Holland, including the falling ruff seen here. This type of ruff came into fashion around 1615 and remained until 1640.[7] As well demonstrating more of an adherence to moralist values, their rise to popularity represented a cultural rebellion against the Spanish influence in Dutch costume, rejecting the starched, stiff ruffs that were favoured in Spain.[8] It also happens to suit the sitter's chosen hairstyle, allowing the lovelock to drape down his left shoulder without any interference.

The panelled doublet worn by the sitter is not of the usual pattern worn at this time. More common are doublets with vertical slashes revealing a different coloured, or maybe patterned, shirt underneath. This does not appear to be the case in the current miniature, as the blue panels maintain a uniform width while slashes would taper more towards the ends. While not as common as slashed doublets, these kinds of garments were still popular, with a comparable example found in a 1623 portrait where a gentleman is seen sporting a shirt with embroidered panels (photographic record in Heinz Archive).

[1] Otherwise called *Moustaches* or *Cadenettes* in France, *Tuyten* in Holland. See Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 303, n.17.

[2] de Winkel, 139, 303, n.16.

[3] Elias Herckmans, *Encomium Calvitii; Lof der Kaalkoppen* (Amsterdam, 1635); William Prynne, *The*

unlovelinesse of LoveLockes (London, 1628), https://archive.org/details/b30337458.

[4] With the exception of portraits from the northern Netherlands depicting members of the international court of Frederick, Elector Palatine (1596-1632). See de Winkel, 139, 303, n. 17.

[5] Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years*, (London: Peter Owen, 1965), 206-209; Elias Herckmans, *Lof der Kaalkoppen* (Amsterdam, 1635); and William Prynne, *The Unlovelinesse of Love-Lockes* (London, 1628). “In summary, one may say that Mr Prynne considered lovelocks and the wearing of them to be Unlovely, Sinful, Unlawfull, Effeminate, Vainglorious, Evil, Odious, Immodest, Indecent, Lascivious, Wanton, Fantastique, Disolute, Singular, Incendiary, Ruffianly, Graceless, Whorish, Ungodly, Horred, Strange, Outlandish, Impudent, Pernicious, Offensive, Ridiculous, Foolish, Childish, Unchristian, Hatefull, Exorbitant, Contemptible, Sloathfull, Unmanly, Depraving, Vaine, and Unseemly” (Corson 209).

[6] The acceptance of the ruff is shown by their adoption by royals and aristocrats across Europe, especially in Holland, England, and Spain. Resistance to the trend is evidenced by writings like Phillip Stubbes’ *Anatomie of Abuses* from 1583 which speaks ill of ruffs – stiff and loose alike– describing the latter “they goe flip flap in the winde, like rags flying abroad, and lye upon their shoulders like the dishcloute of a slut” and the former “the devil, as he in the fulnes of his malice, first invented these great ruffes, so hath hee now found out also two grat states to beare up and maintain this his kingdom of great ruffes (for the devil is king and prince over all the children of pride): the one arch or piller wherby his kingdome of greate ruffes is underpropped, is a certaine kinde of liquide matter which they call starch, wherin the devill hath willed them to wash and dive his ruffes wel, which, when they be dry, wil stand stiffe and inflexible about their necks. The other piller is a certain device made of wyers, crested for the purpose, whipped over either with gold thred, silver or silk, and this he calleth a supportasse or underpropper. This is to be applyed round about their necks under the ruffe, upon the outside of the band, to beare up the whole frame and body of the ruffe from falling and hanging down.” See Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, (1583, repr., edited by John Payne Collier London, 1870), 53-54. Duke University Libraries. https://archive.org/details/anatomieofabuses00stub.

[7] “Ruff,” Fashion History Timeline (Fashion Institute of Technology, September 20, 2017), https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/ruff/.

[8] Annabella Lawlor, “Fashioning Holland: The Hidden Language of Clothing in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Portraiture,” edited by Beatrice Moritz and Marie Frangie, *Canvas Journal*, https://www.canvasjournal.ca/read/fashioning-holland-the-hidden-

language-of-clothing-in-seventeenth-century-dutch-portraiture.