FIG. 10
Jacques Jordaens the Elder, *Two Head Studies of Abraham Grapheus*, c. 1620–21, oil on paper, glued on panel, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, 1899-B

FIG. 15
Quinten Massys,
The Ugly Duchess,
c. 1513, oil on panel,
National Gallery
London, NG5769

FIG. 16
Quinten Massys,
An Old Man,
c. 1513, oil on panel,
private collection,
New York

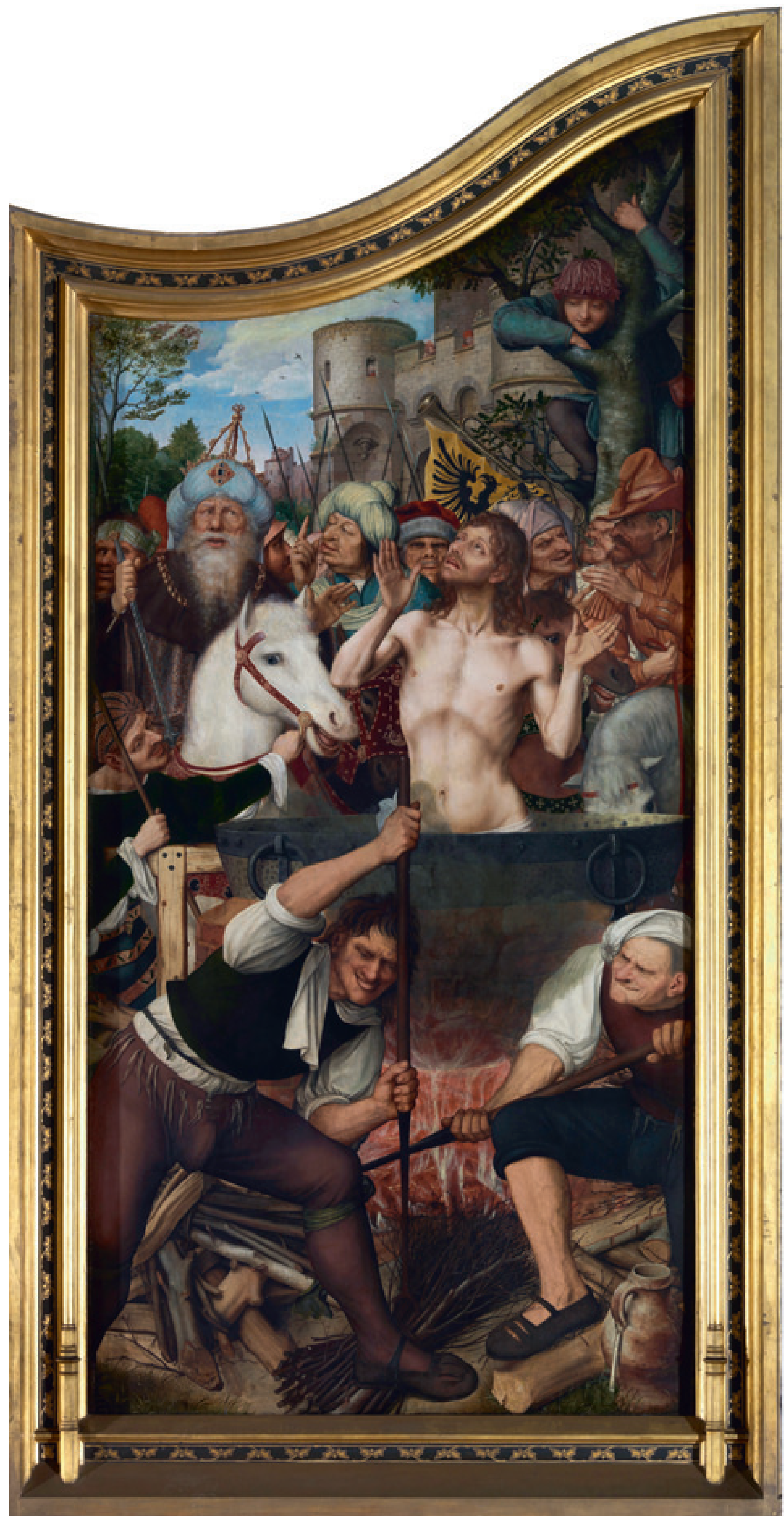


FIG. 17
Quinten Massys,
The Martyrdom of Saint John (right wing), (1511), oil on panel, KMSKA, Antwerp, inv. 248

HEADS IN HISTORIES

From Likeness to Type in Verrocchio, Leonardo, Dürer, Massys and a Follower of Bosch

Michael W. Kwakkelstein

Among the Old Master drawings preserved at the Royal Library in Turin is a red chalk drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) depicting the head of an old man with bushy eyebrows, long wavy hair and a flowing beard seen in three-quarter view (Fig. 18). The drawing would never have achieved the status of one of the world's most famous drawings had it not been endlessly published and advertised as the artist's self-portrait during the last years of his life.[1] The melancholy or sorrowful expression of the man represented in the drawing has often led Leonardo's biographers to speculate about his inner life so as to compensate for the fact that his vast written legacy contains very little information about his personal life.[2] Doubts, however, have sometimes been raised about the identity of the sitter. Some scholars have pointed out that the old man's face bears little resemblance to that of Leonardo in the only known portrait of the artist made from life, while others have argued that it corresponds to a facial type that Leonardo employed in varying contexts throughout his career. Moreover, it has been noted that the style and technique of the drawing suggests a dating not to circa 1515/17, as is commonly assumed, but rather to the 1490s when Leonardo was in his forties.[3]

Accepting a much earlier date for the drawing than the final years of Leonardo's life makes it indeed difficult to understand why he would have depicted himself as old and bearded at a time when, in Italy, beards were considered "the preserve of the barbarous, Germans, Orientals, figures from ancient history, mythology and biblical times, philosophers, hermits, and penitents."[4] These are compelling arguments that undermine the idea of a self-portrait that the Milanese painter and author Giuseppe Bossi (1777–1815) had introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the now-famous drawing resurfaced.

Verrocchio: two head types

Leonardo's drawings attest to his special interest in physiognomy and its expressive power. In addition to drawing portraits, of which only a few have survived, Leonardo enjoyed drawing old men and women with monstrous faces in bust-length profile. Though most of these bizarre types are imaginary and are meant to be humorous, some sketches of profile heads that occur amidst his notes reveal a special interest in the physical changes that occur with old age, especially those caused by edentulism.[5] A third category of head studies consists of drawings

(DETAIL FIG. 28)
Francesco Melzi (after Leonardo da Vinci), *Head of a Man in Three-quarters to the Right*, s.d., Gallerie dell'Accademia, Gabinetto dei disegni e stampe, Venice, 262

with studies of heads of male and female figures of common or idealised beauty that reveal a close dependence on head types in the work of Leonardo's teacher, the Florentine sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio (1435–1488).

From the beginning of his career as an artist, Leonardo adopted not only Verrocchio's ideal of female beauty, but also his use of two classically inspired antithetical facial types: one representing a youth of epicene beauty, and the other depicting a mature, stern-looking man with an aquiline nose and a prominent chin.[6] Both types are derived from ancient coins: the handsome youth bears a close resemblance to the profile portrait of Antinous but also to that of Alexander the Great, whereas the stern type of old man is based on the portrait of the aged Emperor Galba.[7] On a large double-sided sheet with studies of heads in profile, dated to circa 1478, Leonardo illustrated both these classicising types, juxtaposing them to their variants, both male and female, so as to explore the contrasts in facial characteristics due to differences in age (Fig. 19).[8]

Comparable drawing exercises feature a double-sided sheet that once belonged to a Verrocchio sketchbook.[9] The verso of this sheet includes a large study of the vigorous head of an old man, seen in near frontal view, whose features and expression resemble those of Galba (Fig. 20). On comparing this head study by Verrocchio with the head type that recurs, viewed from different angles, in Leonardo's drawings, it becomes immediately apparent that it reflects a sculptural model, and that this model provided the prototype on which Leonardo based many of his depictions of the Galba type (Fig. 21).[10]

Verrocchio employed Galba's aged and vigorous head type mostly for his sculpted figures of warriors – ancient or contemporary.[11] Leonardo followed this example but, in his own drawings and paintings, he extended the use of this ancient motif beyond that of the representation of warriors. In so doing, he changed the appearance of the Galba type by either aging a figure up (Fig. 23) or down (Fig. 25), lending it a beard (Fig. 24), giving it a full head of classically curled hair (Fig. 27), or transforming it into an absurdly deformed head (Fig. 29).[12]

Leonardo applied the same method to vary the appearance of the Antinous/Alexander the Great type (Fig. 26). As evidenced by his depictions of, for example, the *Angel of the Annunciation,* known from a copy (Kunstmuseum, Basel), St John the Evangelist in the *Last Supper* (Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan),

FIG. 18
Leonardo da Vinci, *Self-portrait* (?), c. 1490, 1517–1518, red and black chalk on paper, Biblioteca Reale, Turin, D.C. 15571

FIG. 19
Leonardo da Vinci, *Heads in Profile*, c. 1478–80, pen and ink on paper, The Royal Collection, Windsor, RCIN 912276 verso

FIG. 20
Andrea del Verrocchio and assistant, *Figure Studies*, s.d., silverpoint, pen and brown ink and wash on a pink prepared paper, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, D642 (verso)

FIG. 21
Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of a Man in Profile Facing to the Left*, 1491–1494, pen and brown ink, over soft black chalk, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 10.45.1

FIG. 31
Albrecht Dürer, *Jesus among the Doctors*, 1506, oil on panel, Museo Thyssen–Bornemisza, Madrid, 134 (1934.38)

STUDYING FACES

Heads in Northern Histories

Nico Van Hout

For centuries, history painters pursued a similar approach when it came to persuasively depicting biblical, mythological and historical narratives. Given the static aspect of painting, their first task was to select an eloquent moment from the written sources, one that would be recognisable to the viewer and represent the various figures in a clearly legible context. The rendering of individual facial features posed an additional challenge. Prestigious paintings could quickly run to between ten and several dozen characters, each of which the artist needed to provide with an individual appearance, faithful to real life. According to the Roman author Pliny the Elder, the first time this was done was by the Athenian painter Eumarus, who depicted men and women differently, and from life, and by Cimon of Cleonae, who devised the three-quarter profile and represented faces by having figures look backwards, upwards or downwards.[1] Viewers had to be able, moreover, to read a figure's state of mind and supposed character from their face, if they were to understand a story more clearly.

One of the earliest studies of heads in northern Europe is the so-called *Vienna Model Book*,[2] a collection of fifty-six drawings of human and animal heads made in silverpoint on green-tinted paper and glued to small panels that can be folded up like a concertina. The heads were used as models by a book illuminator employed at the court of King Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia (1361–1419) and might also have been employed as a sales tool to persuade potential patrons. Very few drawn or painted preliminary studies by the great Flemish painters of the fifteenth century have survived. Those that have are primarily studies for complete figures or portraits, together with drawn copies: individual heads are much less common.[3] In his discussion of the Van Eyck brothers' *The Lamb of God*, Karel van Mander wrote in his *Schilder-boeck* (1604) that the altarpiece contains some three hundred and thirty faces, none of which resembles another, and that a range of emotions can be identified in them, including divine seriousness, love and devotion. He describes the humble face of the Virgin Mary, for instance, who seems to be murmuring the words in her book.[4] Painters' studios that carried out large-scale and numerous commissions will, in short, have needed a wide variety of drawn or painted studies of heads and limbs that could be used (and reused) in future paintings.

(DETAIL FIG. 50)
Anthony van Dyck, *Two Studies of a Man's Head*, c. 1618, oil on canvas, mounted on panel, Snijders&Rockoxhuis, Antwerp, 77.111

Grotesque heads in Leonardo, Bosch and Dürer

Artists usually chose attractive and symmetrical faces for sacred and noble figures, while grotesque, deformed heads had long been a tried and tested way of depicting morally reprehensible characters. This was entirely in keeping with the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans, who associated the beautiful with the good and the true, and the ugly with the bad and the false. An aristocratic-looking elderly man wearing a laurel wreath, for instance, is depicted in Leonardo da Vinci's pen-and-ink drawing *A Man Tricked by Passers-by* (Fig. 39), surrounded by sinister figures whose grimacing faces signal their wicked intent. There are several similar studies by Leonardo of fancifully deformed couples with strange noses, chins and foreheads, which were turned into prints at an early stage by Wenzel Hollar, among others (Fig. 32, 33 and 34). We find a similar contrast between 'pure' and 'evil' in two crowded compositions executed in close-up to heighten the oppressive atmosphere: *Christ Carrying the Cross*, attributed to a follower of Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1530–1540) (Fig. 31), and *Jesus among the Doctors* (1506) by Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 31). In the first painting, an innocent Christ and a serene Saint Veronica are surrounded by sixteen vicious heads with intimidating noses and conspicuous headgear. The latter are all imaginary and stylised heads which were not drawn from living models, the reality of which has been deliberately distorted. Panofsky rightly likened the evil heads in this surreal image to a scene from a nightmare.[5]

Dürer's painting shows the young Christ surrounded by the heads of six Jewish scribes with pronounced noses, who eye him suspiciously. The gesture of Christ's hands at the centre of the composition seems to express his theological arguments, while the large hands with bent fingers of the scholar shown in profile might suggest that his reasoning is also crooked. The German master completed the painting during his time in Venice, doing so according to the inscription in just five days (*Opus quinque Dierum*). This was possible thanks to his simplified, experimental technique, in which Dürer drew the figures on the panel with finely hatched brushstrokes which he then covered with a thin, transparent layer of paint. He based the Christ figure on a drawing he had made from life of a young man with long hair (Albertina, Vienna).[6] More notably – and not, perhaps without significance – is the absence of preparatory studies for the scribes, who nonetheless define the image to a very large extent. Perhaps the master did not work from life in this instance but was guided instead by his own visual experiences, observations, memories or mental stereotypes because, as Dürer himself wrote, 'a well-practised artist does not need to copy living models for every picture because he sufficiently pours out that which he has been collecting within him for a long time'.[7]

Dürer and human proportion

Like others before and after him, Dürer set out to record the principles and rules of art for future artists. He worked on and off on several ambitious treatises on art theory, which were published posthumously as *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* [Four Books on Human Proportion] (1528) (Fig. 36). Using these texts, Dürer aimed to teach his readers how to represent a variety of human types based on mathematical figures and pure measurement: to measure, after all, is to know. In the first two books, he distinguished between squat and elongated figures measuring seven to ten times the height of a human head. The human body, the artist believed, could be broken down into geometric figures such as the sphere, cube or cone. We find a neat application of this principle in two drawings on Venetian blue paper of a child's head, observed from above and turned three quarters to the left (Fig. 38).[8] Unlike the Roman Vitruvius or the Italian Alberti, however, Dürer does not seem to have believed in absolute, ideal human proportions, even if he did mention the famous story about the Ancient Greek painter Zeuxis, who supposedly composed an ideal human figure from the most beautiful parts of different models.[9] The artist struggled to define his ideal of beauty, seeking to do so based on vague criteria such as 'function', 'naïve approval' and the 'happy medium'. The third book deals with the alteration of proportions according to mathematical rules applied to both figures and faces. To this end, the artist split the human face into four parts, which he enlarged or reduced to create physiognomies that looked very different – to the point of caricature in some instances (Fig. 35). The fourth and final book deals with the movement of bodies in space.

Head studies and the studio practice of Frans Floris

As well as imaginary heads of their own invention and ones borrowed from the work of others, by the early sixteenth century, artists had already begun to create heads based on living models – often peasants or simple-looking figures.

FIG. 39
Leonardo da Vinci, *A Man Tricked by Passers-by*, s.d., pen and ink on paper, The Royal Collection, Windsor, inv. RCIN 912495

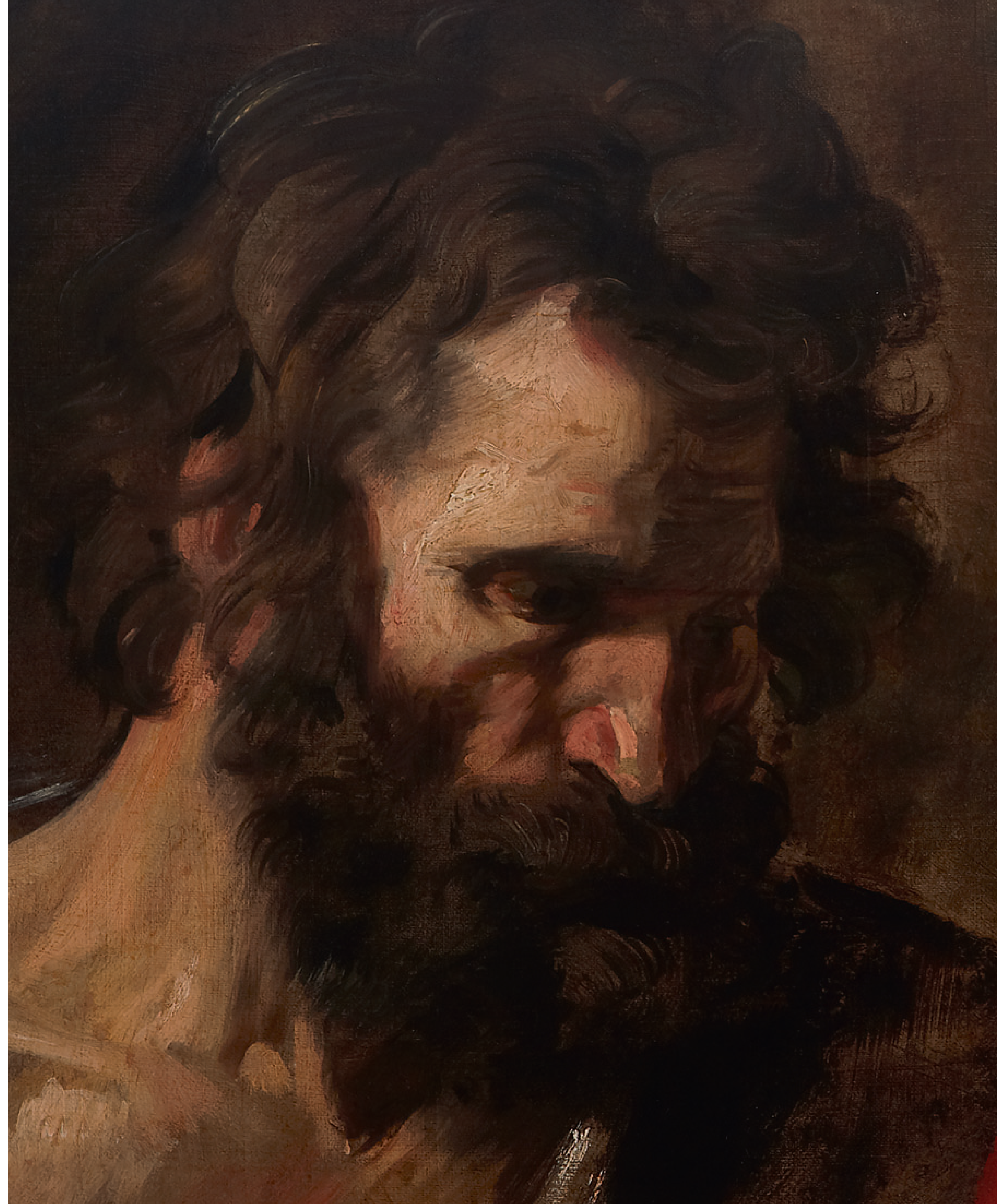
obsession with the picturesque ugliness of his model in isolation from the earlier tradition of expressive or deformed character heads in Dürer and Massys. The head of the old woman in left profile that we discussed earlier (Fig. 46) can be found in a secondary figure in *Offering to Ceres* in the Prado (Fig. 52). When it came to paintings such as *The Tribute Money* in Copenhagen, Jordaens drew heavily on his stock of heads, which could actually become more of a *raison d'être* for the composition than depicting an interesting story.[29]

Jan Brueghel the Younger once saw his uncle, the engraver Pieter de Jode the Elder, posing in Van Dyck's studio. The young artist promised that 'I will make a fine apostle of him.'[30] Van Dyck had a penchant for wiry, almost gaunt models with wild hair and deep-set eyes, which ensured strong shadows; examples include the imposing *Two Head Studies of a Bearded Man*, in New York (Fig. 117), another *Two Studies of a Man's Head* (Fig. 50) and the *Head Study* (Fig. 54), in Antwerp. He captured the sometimes dark psyche of his models with a palette of earth colours and powerful, confident brushwork. A similar interest in the personality of models characterises the work of Michaelina Wautier, who is known to have produced several studies of young people. This artist had the ability to capture the pose and expression of her model as if in a snapshot (Fig. 55).

As the great Antwerp history painters died and their studios declined in the late seventeenth century, head studies also lost their function. A substantial number of sketched studies of this kind were posthumously 'refined' or 'upgraded' by other artists, who added costumes and attributes to them. In this guise, the works then found their way onto the art market as standalone tronies.[31]

1 Pliny the Elder 1952, Book XXXV, xxxiv, 55–57. Reiterated by Van Mander 1604, 64r.
2 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. KK 5003. Scheller 1995, 226–232, no. 20. For the transition from patterns to studies from life, see: *From Pattern to Nature in Italian Renaissance Drawing: Pisanello to Leonardo*. Proceedings of the international conference held at the Dutch University for Art History, Florence, 6–7 May 2011.
3 Koreny 2002, 22–25, 64–66, no. 12; 77–81, no. 15.
4 Van Mander, 1604, 200v.
5 Panofsky 1948, I, 114. One of the heads – the man with the hook nose in right profile at the top – is based on a horizontally reversed figure in a drawing by Bosch, the *Disreputable Pair* (c. 1505–1516), Lehman Collection, New York. Koreny 2002, 20, Fig. 23; 188–189, no. 46
6 Dürer made similar sharply observed anatomical studies, studies of drapery and heads looking up on blue paper in preparation for the Heller altarpiece (c. 1507–1509). See Sander and Schulz 2013, 219–233.
7 *Hierin sind begriffen Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*, boek 3, fol. T3v.: 'Das ist die ursach das ein wol geübter künstner nit zu einem yetlichem bild darff lebendige bilder ab machen/dann er geust genugsam herauß was er lang zeyt von aussen hineyn gesamlet hat.' Quoted from Parshall 2013, 399, note 27. The English translation is from *idem.* p. 399.
8 Dürer used these head studies for the putti in the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* (Národní Galerie, Prague) and again for angels in the *Madonna with the Siskin* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, both c. 1506) and in the Heller altarpiece (c. 1507/09, disappeared in 1729). See Grollemund 2013, no. 4; Metzger 2019, 458–459, nos. 128–140.
9 Rupprich 1956, vol. 3, 272, lines 19–20 (c. 1512/1513).
10 Hans Baldung Grien, *Head of an Old Man* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, cat. 552B, c. 1518/1519), painted on paper and then glued onto a panel.
11 Quentin Massys, *Head of an Old Man* Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, inv. 064998-000, c. 1525).
12 Studies in private hands. Van Hout 2020, 20–21 and text ill. 1–3.
13 Miedema 1994, 193. Sellink 2019, 272–273.
14 Wouk 2018, 216–243.
15 Miedema 1994, 229.
16 Van Hout 2020, 17–70.
17 Rooses-Ruelens 1887–1909, VI, 222–224, doc. DCCCLXI; Magurn 1955, 410–41, no. 244.
18 The artist was robbed of 'Una testa d'un Giovene nominato Baldassaro con I capelli nigri et rizzi una testa di simuni fatta a guise di donna una testa di marinaro una testa di san Petro una testa d'una donna con li capilli sparsi una testa di lucia co lu pettu rigido una testa di lettore alla satiresca et una testa che grida con la bocca aperta,' quoted from Mendola 1999, 61, note 18; and Eaker 2015, 186. Possibly identifiable as Barnes *et al.* 2004), nos. I.4, I.42 and under no. I.41.
19 Van Hout 2020, 59–61.
20 Jombert 1773, 3.
21 By Lavater 1775–1778, among others.
22 McGrath 2008; Van Haute 2015; Kolfin 2017; Esposito 2020.
23 The head on the right from this study can be found in Jordaens's *Apollo and Marsyas*, Belfius Bank Collection (c. 1625).
24 By Barocci's biographer Gian Pietro Bellori. Wohl, Wohl and Monatanari 2005, 171.
25 Van Hout 2020, nos. 47A and B, 52A, 61.
26 Watteeuw 2015, 66–67; Van Hout 2020, 33–34.
27 Inventory of Cornelia van Aken, Antwerp, 4 May 1693. Duverger 2002, 256.
28 Merle du Bourg 2012.
29 *The Tribute Money. Peter Finding the Silver Coin in the Mouth of the Fish* or *'The Ferry Boat to Antwerp'*, c. 1623, (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, inv. KMS3198). See Wadum and de la Fuente Pedersen 2008.
30 'Ick sal der wel eenen frayen apostel aff maecken.' See Galesloot 1868, 595. For Van Dyck's apostles, see Roland 1984 and Lammertse 2002.
31 Van Hout 2020, 63–66.

(DETAIL FIG. 117)
Anthony van Dyck, *Two Head Studies of a Bearded Man*, 1618–1620, oil on canvas, private collection



DRESSED UP

'A Thousand Fine Concoctions': Costumed Heads

Lizzie Marx

The taste for textiles

Tronies carefully decorated with a myriad of costumes and accessories represent a subcategory of the genre that captivated artists in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Flesh and facial hair converged with feathers, draped pearls, headpieces and swathes of fabric in a costumed tronie. The various trappings that dressed the head placed it into different periods and places, evoking an encounter with a character from a world beyond the viewer's reality.

The artists of the Low Countries were working out of a tradition that valued the qualities of costume, and where particular outfits could hold allegorical significance. The iconographer Cesare Ripa (c. 1555–1622) detailed at great length the role of costume in the identification of allegories where, for instance, "Good Nature" is depicted draped in a robe of golden cloth. Head coverings were also significant, as in the old woman who embodied "Irresolution", shown wearing a black cloth wrapped around her head. The head of the allegory of "Content", meanwhile, is to be lavishly embellished with a plume of feathers and jewels.[1] The artist-biographer Karel van Mander (1548–1606), on the other hand, concentrated his discussion of costume on the fall of drapery, as discussed in the tenth chapter of his *Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting* of 1604.[2] Later, Philips Angel (c. 1618–1664) observed in his *Praise of Painting* from 1642 that knowledge of the varying textures of materials was important, as silk, velvet, wool and linen all responded differently to light.[3]

Costumed head studies were helpful to artists in developing the compositions of the different genres of painting that grew in popularity during the seventeenth century. The genre scene, which was established around the mid-sixteenth century, portrayed the different "types" of characters that made up society in the Low Countries. It required the study of people, where their clothing represented their social background. The taste for history painting called for figures dressed in biblical or antique attire that contrasted with the conventional clothing of the viewers. The head studies lent themselves particularly well as works for reference in the creation of ambitious compositions that recounted stories from distant lands and eras. Studies of elaborately bedecked heads may have also aided working up the fashionable *portrait historié*, or historiated portrait, where the sitter was costumed so as to assume the roles of literary or historical characters.[4]

(DETAIL FIG. 67)
Circle of Rembrandt, *The Man with the Golden Helmet*, c. 1650, oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 811A

THE HAT MAKES THE PERSON

The career of the celebrated hat designer Elvis Pompilio began in 1987 with a simple showroom. These days he is known all over the world. This is a story of the milliner's profession and what it does to both the maker and the wearer of the headgear we call 'hats'.

'I started making hats when I was very young and have been doing it for forty years now. We didn't wear hats ourselves back then, but I loved accessories. I studied art and learnt to paint and sculpt. At the end of the day, a hat is a piece of sculpture. That's also what prompted me to start designing fashion.'

'Lots of designers buy their wooden forms ready-made. That's not creation as far as I'm concerned. I make them myself and choose my own materials. I'm involved in the design and execution from the beginning to the end. As Accessories teacher at La Cambre in Brussels, I ask my students at the beginning of each academic year to make a volume in paper or other material, and then reproduce it in a wooden model. Models like that don't follow the shape of the skull, they change it. You can use round, pointed or very high or low shapes to change the way someone looks. It's my job, after all, to improve my customers' appearance, to make them look good. If you have a long face, a high hat won't work. A beret or a low-cut shape is better in that case.'

'The right hat can balance a face. It's a bit like the way Dürer plays with the proportions of facial features in his treatise. If you put on a hat very low or very high, it changes the dynamic, the intention to please or to repel. Depending on the hat you wear, you can feel more welcoming, more dominant, or more aloof. Even when I have a shape that looks good, I still have to trim it sometimes to achieve the ideal proportions. That's very labour intensive. A difference of two centimetres in a hat changes everything.'

'The invasion of cheap hats means that everyone these days is wearing the same imported headgear. It's making the millinery profession increasingly rare. Once upon a time, I was one milliner among many. Nowadays, I'm steadily turning into an artist. The more time that goes by, the stronger the artistic idea is within me. It has turned into *haute couture*. Materials are important to this. I take account, for instance, of how fabrics reflect. In a photograph, a hat can catch the light or cancel it out. You see the face or you see less of it. You can really transform people with a hat.' 'You almost never see the writer Amélie Nothomb without the hat I made for her. The accessory creates her character, even in cartoons of her. I like to create characters with my collections. Without the hats, they would be almost unrecognisable. Which means they can go incognito, while wearing my hats lets them reshape their personality. There's something very strange about it.' 'Conversely, the character of the models inspires me too. That's important. Before I choose a hat, I talk to people to see whether they are more of an extrovert or an introvert. After we've talked, we can decide what to choose. Outgoing people could use a little compensation and a little respite. In that case, I won't suggest overly extravagant, overly flashy hats. Shy people, on the other hand, need to be pushed a bit. So for them I recommend extravagant and colourful hats.'

'There are also people who wear hats to protect themselves and make themselves less accessible, to create distance or look different. In those cases, the hat becomes a mask. Some people who attend weddings want to conceal something. The same goes for funerals, with black veils to disguise the pain and emotion. Big hats cast deep shadows and create mystery. In the famous painting, *The Man with the Golden Helmet*, the artist emphasises the helmet, which tells us more about the model. The military accessory defines the figure. Without the helmet, he could be anything, he might be a farmer. Now we see that he is a warrior. It is more the idea of the helmet that counts and more the reflection of the light than the face of the sad old man, who seems to have lost all his sparkle.

Hollywood stars understand the potential of hats to seduce or to accentuate their femininity or masculinity. It's linked to wearing a uniform. Without a hat, the uniform doesn't exist. Think of police officers and their caps, the fezzes worn by Greek Evzones in their skirts and pompom shoes, and the wide-brimmed feathered hats of the Italian Bersaglieri, which my father used to wear, and which showed which regiment you belonged to and what rank you were. Things like that might not mean much these days, but they used to signal your status in society.'

Elvis Pompilio (1961) is a Belgian hat designer. He works for leading fashion brands like Dior, Chanel, Valentino and Demeulemeester. His creations are owned and admired by celebrities including Madonna, Sharon Stone, Axelle Red, Harrison Ford and members of several royal families. Some of Elvis Pompilio's designs are now on display in major museums, such as the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

Stephane Boudin,
Elvis Pompilio,
2022, photograph

FIG. 61
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Engravings from '*Toonneel des wereldts: Ontdeckende de ongestuymigheden en ydelheden in woorden ende wercken deser verdorvene eeuwe*', 1658, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

FIG. 62
Hendrick Goltzius, *Laughing Jester with Needle and Thread*, 1590–1610, gravure, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,

FIG. 63
Philips Galle, *Head of a Jester*, c. 1560, ink on paper, Noord-Hollands Archief, Haarlem, NL-hlmNHA_1477_53008458

FIG. 68
Rembrandt, *An Old Man in Military Costume*, 1631, oil on panel, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, 78.PB.246

FIG. 69
Rembrandt, *Bust of an Old Man Wearing a Fur Cap*, 1630, oil on panel, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, Gem 599

LIGHT AND SHADOW

'According to the Demands of the Composition' On Light, Tronies, and Head Studies

Koen Bulckens

Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem (Fig. 102) displays Rembrandt's brilliant mastery of light as an artist. The prophet is seated in a cave, alongside items he managed to save from the temple of Jerusalem before it was destroyed.[2] Colours and tones create a delicate atmospheric perspective, blending into a convincing illusion of depth. There is an attention to light effects created by particular elements. The brocade fabric and precious metalware shimmer. A fire devouring the city in the background colours the night sky golden. Lastly, the artist directs our attention to the face at the centre with a dramatic spotlight, giving extra force to its wrinkled expression of melancholy.

Rembrandt (1606/7–1669) has long held a reputation as a painter of light, yet he was but one of many artists who studied this phenomenon with great intensity in his day.[3] Evidence of an increasing engagement with light is found in works of art of the period as well as in contemporary writings on them. North of the Alps, lighting became the focal point of changing preferences in art theory.[4] This tradition was inaugurated in the Dutch city of Haarlem in 1604, where Karel van Mander (1548–1606) published the first Dutch-language book on painting. Van Mander developed new concepts to describe the novel effects of light which he saw in paintings by his contemporaries.[5] Importantly, the interest in light was not confined to the realm of art. Natural philosophers and mathematicians studying optics, understood to be the science of sight, devoted increasing attention to it. This culminated in Isaac Newton's (1643–1727) radically new understanding of the nature of light and colour.

The painterly fascination with light will here be studied in conjunction with the artistic interest in faces. Painters studied heads from life in particular lighting conditions, noting how light and shade defined their features in different settings. This interplay of light and faces is the topic of this essay. After a brief word about light in tronies painted in the Northern Netherlands – in Rembrandt's circle – focus then shifts to head studies produced in the Southern Netherlands – Rubens's circle. The lighting of these pictures has received little attention in art-historical literature, while the artists who painted them were clearly very concerned with it. I will discuss several of their works and notes on light in order to make this clear.

(DETAIL FIG. 116)
Peter Paul Rubens, *Head Study of a Bearded Man*, 1622–1624, oil on panel, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, NGI.2016.21

Stephan Vanfleteren

TRONIES

Heads. You see them everywhere. In shopping streets, on the tram, in cafés, on screens, between the sheets and even in the mirror. It is nothing more than a fleshy egg with skin. Often the head – as well as our hands – is the only uncovered part of our body. The rest keeps secrets from strangers. A face is unguarded. Stark naked, despite a range of camouflaging techniques such as moustaches, beards, sunglasses, hats. The head is where looking, hearing, kissing, cursing, smelling and speaking all happen. The most important little factory of small humanity. Heads are the incubators of loves, ideas and decisions.

I have a weakness for remarkable heads. When I see one on the street, I become enraptured and the world stands still for a moment. You know a striking head when you see it, before you even know why.

It could be the big nose, unusual eyes or ears; or atypical proportions that only become apparent later. Or sometimes not even then. Sometimes you just can't explain why one person's head stands out from thousands of other more average ones. Why is it that certain faces "work" in the two-dimensional world of a photograph or painting? It's a riddle that after all these years of watching, observing and studying I still can't solve. Some heads don't "speak", even if they have a voice. The code of the face defies all efforts to crack it.

Humans evolve slowly, that's what wise old Darwin taught us. The question of whether faces today are different from faces in the Middle Ages often crosses my mind. There probably shouldn't be much difference but, just like our planet, people themselves are currently caught up in a whirl of accelerated change brought about by artificial influences. The big changes can't be explained by the slow theory of evolution, but the answer may lie in the habits and customs of modern humans. It used to be normal for teeth to fall out and for jaws to collapse because of a lack of hygiene. Forward-jutting chins weren't corrected in the past either. A used-up body fell apart more quickly in olden times. I saw it with my own eyes in the very old people I encountered in my earlier days. Sometimes I fool myself I'm one of the last to have captured that in photography. I came across these extraordinary heads amongst the solitary farmers living in remote and derelict houses, and amongst the fishermen who still sailed distant seas without the use of modern technology. Hard labour occupations, at one with the elements of nature. Signposts from a time when there was no dentist in every village and no creams against the sun's glare.

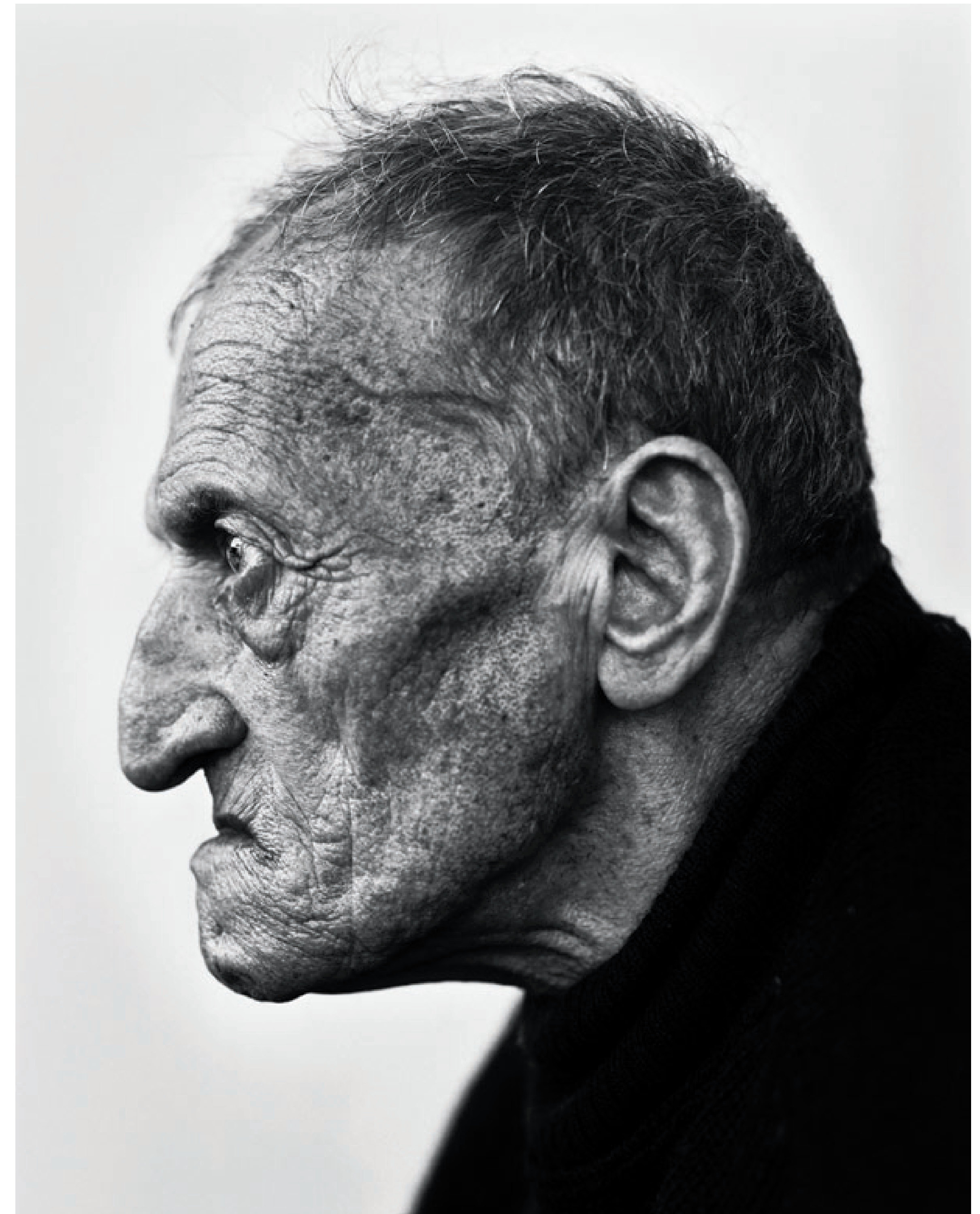
That has certainly had its impact on the appearance of the face. Fisherman Julien is a typical model, his skin well tanned by the salt of many decades at sea, his pores fairly sand-blasted. With his chin sticking out like the prow of a ship and a nose so curved that you could cast it as an anchor, he would fit right into *Christ Carrying the Cross* painted by Hieronymus Bosch. You can spot at least five Juliens in the crowd populating that masterpiece.

Today, children are sent to orthodontists, everyone goes to the dentist for an annual check-up, little ones are lathered in sunscreen before playing on the beach, and most people work in offices instead of outdoors. The *tronie* is gradually fading from view in our society and is being replaced by the *face*.

The word *tronie* has taken on a negative connotation in modern Dutch, associated with ugly criminals, outlaws and bad guys, like *beak* or *mug* in English. It used to be a more innocent word, with a specific meaning in the art-historical context. Julien had a *tronie* but no trace of malignancy. His face is an iconic picture of an old fisherman. It's not really about him personally, but about what his face expresses: tanned by the hard life of another time.

In recent years, the modern face is presenting an even greater transformation. Botox, hair implants and other cosmetic procedures are becoming more and more common. The face is not the barometer of age that it used to be. What's worse, emotions sometimes disappear from the face that sports lip injections, fillers, or eyelid corrections. If the current wizardry continues on its careening path, it will become impossible to guess whether somebody is happy or sad, angry or excited, distraught, apathetic or turned on. Out-of-control aestheticisation of the human body and face comes at the price of a frozen facial expression. A wrinkle is no longer seen as time's badge of honour; one prefers the fool's gold of a face plumped with silicone. The tauter the skin, the less interesting the physiognomy. Due to an obsession with eternal youthfulness, the face is losing its vitality and is becoming increasingly difficult to read. Bereft of its essence, the face is becoming a metaphorical orphan.

Stephan Vanfleteren (1969) is a multiple-award winning Belgian photographer. Internationally he is best known for his piercing portraits and documentary work.



Stephan Vanfleteren,
Julien, 2003, photograph

FIG. 103
Rembrandt,
Old Man Looking Down,
1631, etching, Museum
Het Rembrandthuis,
Amsterdam, 177

FIG. 104
Rembrandt,
Old Man with a Beard and White Sleeve,
s.d., etching, Museum
Het Rembrandthuis,
Amsterdam, 204

FIG. 105
Rembrandt,
Old Man with a Long Beard, c. 1630,
etching, Museum
Het Rembrandthuis
Amsterdam, 208

FIG. 106
Rembrandt, *Old Man with Long Beard Looking Down*, 1630,
etching, Museum
Het Rembrandthuis,
Amsterdam, 216

FIG. 118
Michael Sweerts, *Head of a Girl*, c. 1654, oil on canvas, Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, L.F201.1975.0.0

FIG. 119
Jacob van Oost the Younger, *Bust of a Young Man in Profile*, c. 1665, oil on canvas, Mauritshuis, The Hague, 297