



Dou

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Gerrit Dou

(1613-1675)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

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Masters of Art Series

Gerrit Dou



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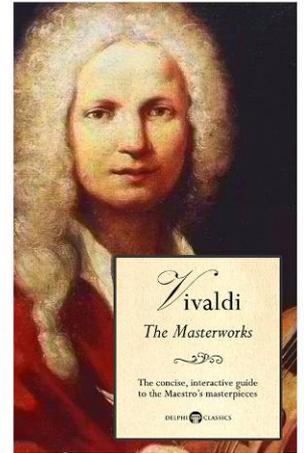
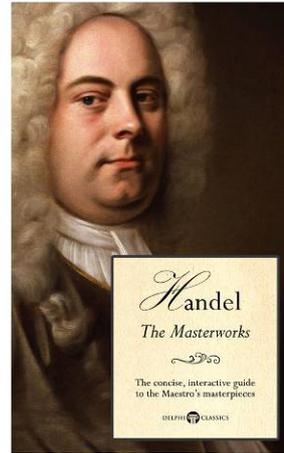
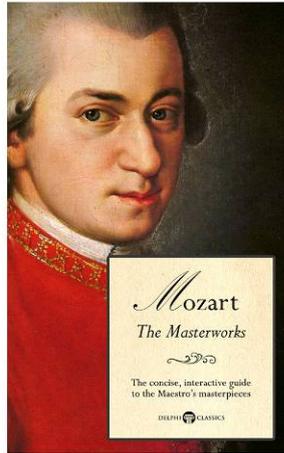
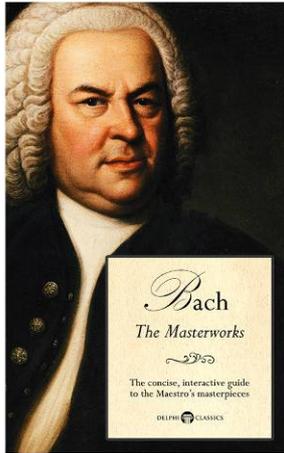
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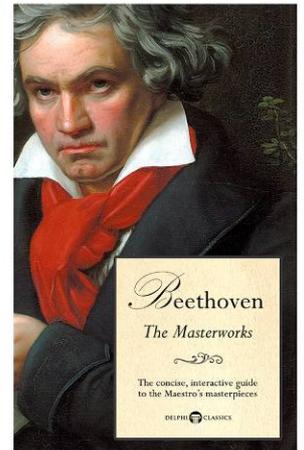
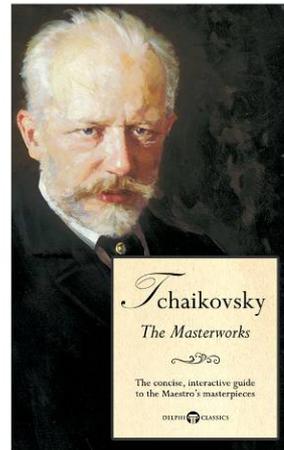
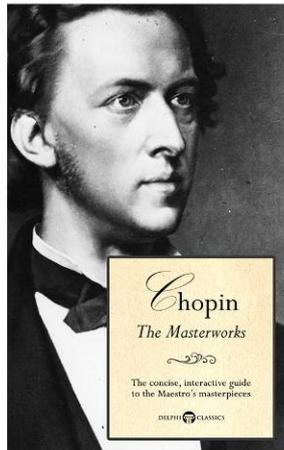
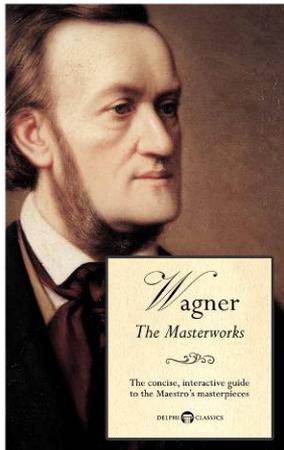
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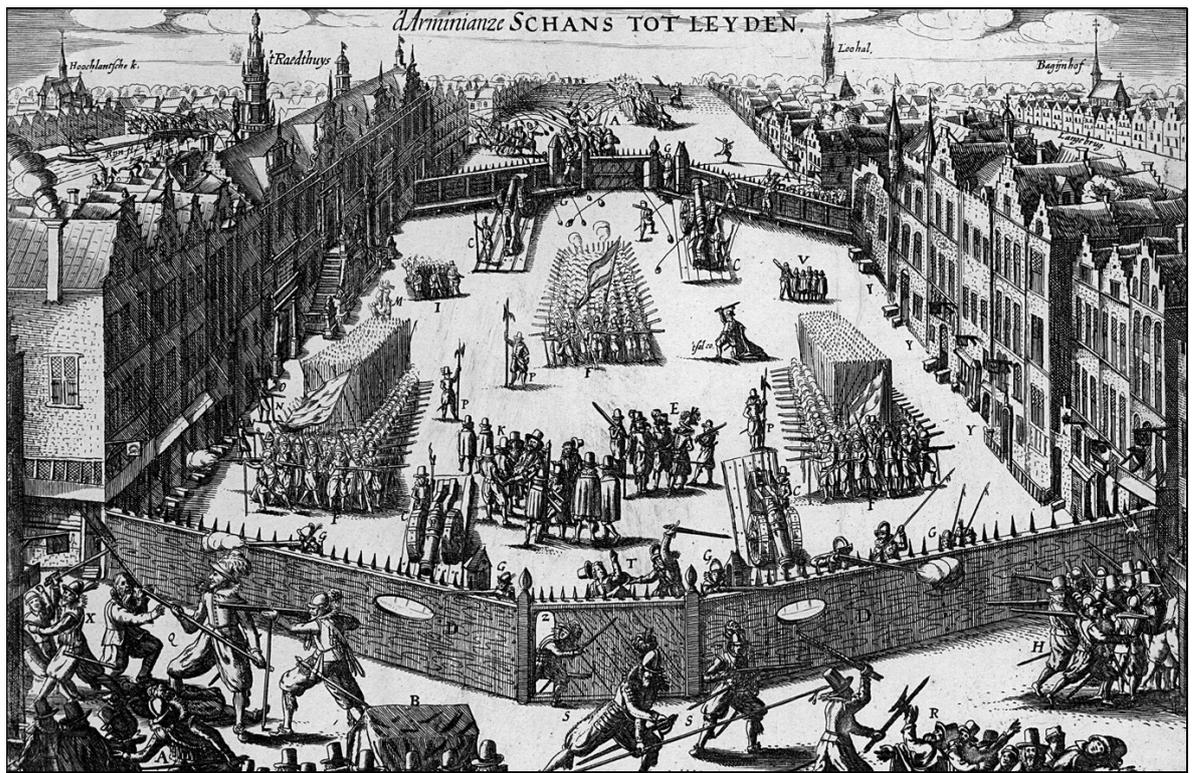


[*Explore the series so far...*](#)

The Highlights



Leiden, a city in the province of South Holland — Gerrit Dou's birthplace



Print of Leiden in 1618 by Jan Luyken

The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Dou's most celebrated paintings is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

Old Woman Reading (1632)



A master of the Dutch Golden Age and Rembrandt's student, Gerrit Dou was born in Leiden on 7 April 1613. His wealthy father, who owned the second most important workshop for manufacturing church glass in the city, recognised his son's precocious talent for painting and sent him at the age of ten to learn the principles of draftsmanship with Bartholomeus Dolendo (c. 1570-1626). The child remained with Dolendo for a year and a half. Then, Dou studied his father's craft for two and a half years with Pieter Couwenhorn and soon his name appeared in the glazenmakers' guild records. However, his father was concerned for Dou's safety due to his reckless and undaunted manner in installing and mending glass. He decided to send his son to learn the art of painting. On 14 February 1628, at the age of fourteen, Dou entered the studio of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), who was in fact his elder by just seven years. Their two families had been close neighbours and friends for many years.

Rembrandt had returned to his native Leiden in 1625 to set up as an independent history painter. There, he worked closely with Jan Lievens (1607-1674), sharing a studio. Rembrandt and Lievens depicted many of the same subjects in closely related compositions, employing the same models and carrying out the same technical experiments. Around the time of Dou's arrival at the studio, Rembrandt was beginning to favour the technique of the Utrecht painter Gerrit van Honthorst (1592-1676), a great admirer of Caravaggio's Baroque style. Therefore, Rembrandt's paintings were marked by strong contrasts of light and shadow, experimenting with artificial illumination. Earlier combinations of yellows, greens, light blues, pinks and violets were supplanted with a preference for tonal harmonies of browns and greys. Rembrandt's paintings also featured older figures, such as prophets and hermits, while adopting a more subtle narrative approach. These changes are detected in the paintings of the young Dou, during his time in Rembrandt's workshop.

Dou remained with Rembrandt for three years, during which he became a distinguished master in his own name. From Rembrandt, he borrowed much of his early subject matter, including portraits, head studies and hermits. For many of his compositions, Dou appropriated Rembrandt's archetypal figure-type, the *mise-en-scène* and dramatic contrasts of light and dark in a Caravaggesque manner. Rembrandt's enduring interest in self portraiture also made an impression on his gifted protégé.

Old Woman Reading, now held in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, is one of Dou's most accomplished early works in the Rembrandt style. It is a large-size canvas (rare for Dou), utilising a thick application of paint and impressive breadth of execution. The fine painterly brushwork captures a naturalistic impression of the old woman's features and the textures of her clothing. Another highlight is the bravura delineation of the pages of the old tome she is reading. Not only the old woman and her clothes are painted with precision, but also the Biblical text and the accompanying print are detailed and clearly legible. The old woman is reading the beginning of the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, where it states that whoever really wants to act virtuously should give as much of their earthly possessions to the poor as they can. This message seems to contradict the old woman's expensive clothing; clearly, she still clings to her possessions and the lesson has still to be learnt. The painting may

allude in part to the prophetess Hannah, described in the Bible as serving God night and day in the Temple (Luke 2:37).

Dou depicts the old woman in a remarkably realistic approach for his time by Northern European standards. He employs a direct viewpoint, bringing the subject close to the viewer, emphasising a personal nature. We can be in no doubt as to what the woman is reading and we are encouraged to judge her actions. The use of *chiaroscuro* stresses the most important details, ensuring we focus our attention on the subject's grizzled features. Compositionally, Dou creates a soothing diagonal contrast between the upper left and the lower right sections of the canvas. The background is smooth, sober and plain, so as not to distract our attention.

Although Rembrandt and Dou used the same model when painting this subject, the two artists depict the old woman's piety in a different manner. Rembrandt's panel presents an almost full-length figure, surrounded by an expanse of darkness, while she is bathed in a sacred light. Dou has opted for a larger, half-length figure, preferring an even illumination, exploring her features more closely, picking out her hand's wrinkles, the crow's feet around her eyes and the book's text. Dou's intimate viewpoint underlines her age and human failings in greater detail. Note her slightly open lips, as she appears to mumble the words she is reading and the manner in which she holds the book closely to her near-sighted eyes, struggling to make out the words. Whereas Rembrandt's painting places significance on the sacred nature of the Bible reading, Dou's portrayal encourages a more secular study of the reader herself.

Regardless of the undoubted high qualities of both paintings, Rembrandt must have been impressed, perhaps even a little concerned, by his gifted student's handling of the same theme, realising that it would not be long till Dou would be opening his very own workshop...





Detail



Detail



Detail



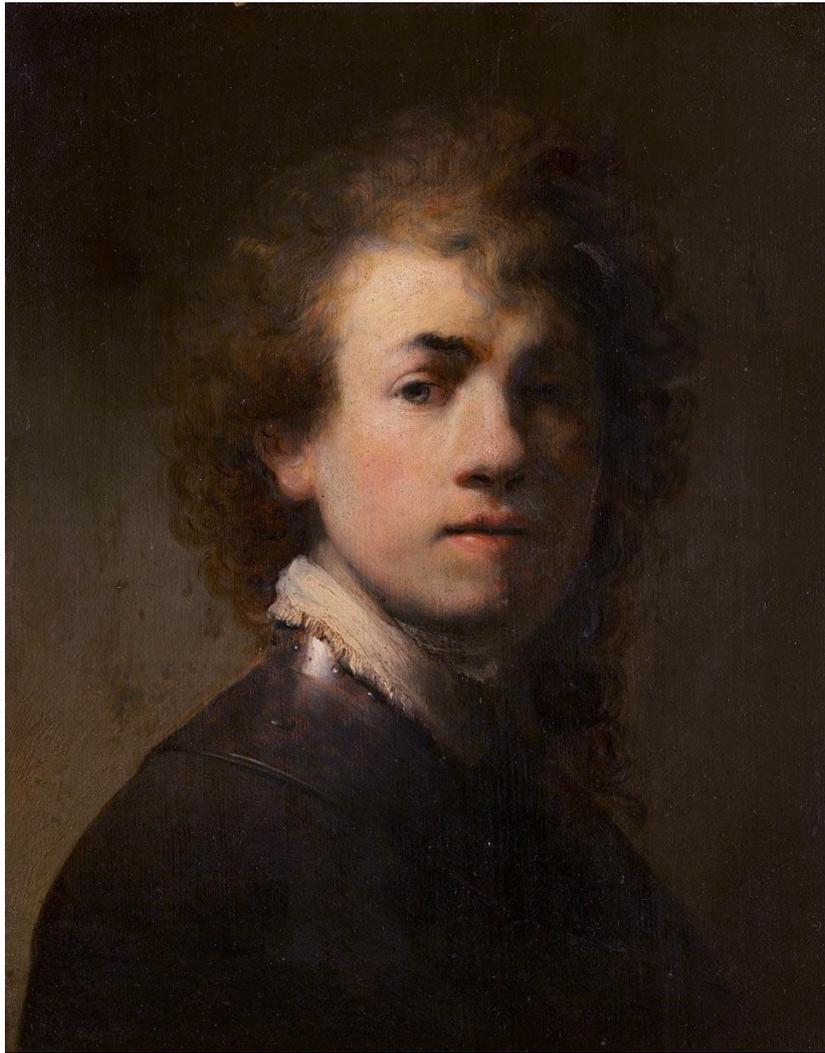
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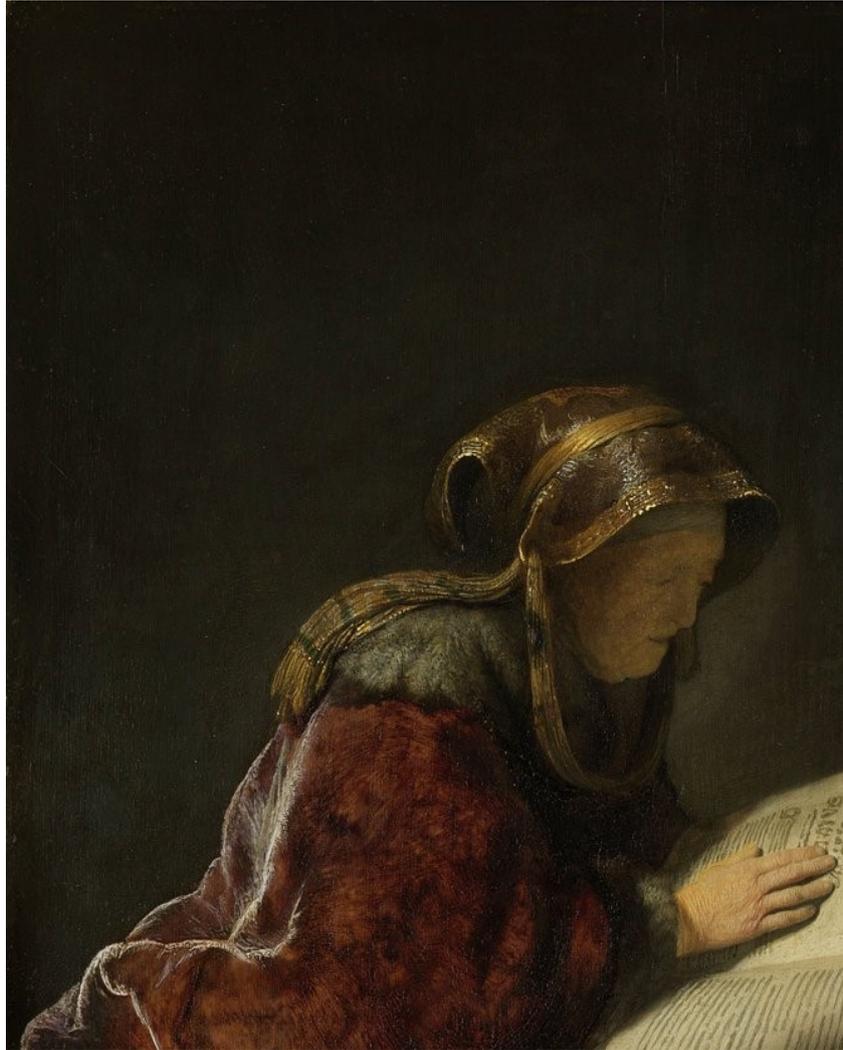
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Self-Portrait of Dou, c. 1631



Rembrandt's 'Self Portrait in a Gorget', Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg – completed soon after accepting Dou as his student, c. 1629



Rembrandt's handling of the same theme with the same model, 1631



Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, where many Dou and Rembrandt masterpieces are exhibited

Man Interrupted at His Writing (1635)



Dou's initial training as a church glass artisan served him in good stead for his ambition to become an artist, helping inform his approach to painting. The technique of cutting glass with a diamond demanded a steady hand, which he learned to great effect. He developed a method of applying enamel-like colours in a series of glazes, in keeping with the church glass decoration schemes he was familiar with. He opted for bright, saturated blues, greens and purples, often preferred by glass painters. The meticulous demands of working in glass, where designs had to be transferred on to paper in a painstaking degree of concentration, may well explain his future preference for small compositions. Like the church glass works he coloured in his youth, Dou's paintings indicate a similar polish and characteristic smooth finish. To aid this impression, he preferred working on panels rather than canvases, as a firm wooden surface attained the required finish.

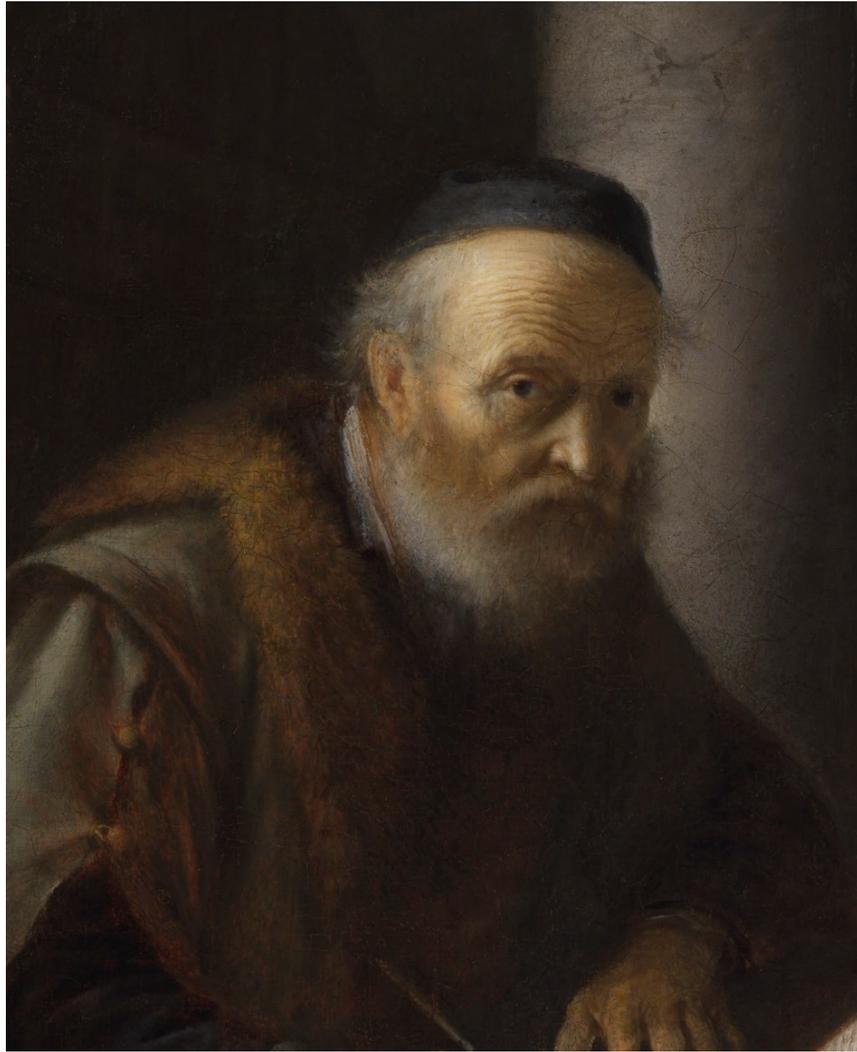
At the end of 1631, Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam, a city rapidly expanding as the business and trade capital, where he set up as a professional portraitist for the first time. Having escaped the shadow of his great master, Dou was now free to establish his own reputation among the wealthiest of patrons. He still continued to execute the subject matter and refined style that he had learned and developed in Rembrandt's studio. In short time, he was being lauded as an exemplary painter of the Leiden art world, securing the lucrative interest of the patron Pieter Spiering, an influential Delft tapestry manufacturer, who would annually pay Dou a sum of 500 guilders for the right of first refusal of his works. Fine painting in seventeenth century Holland was an enormously time-consuming process and very expensive to produce. The clientele for such works was limited to a very small circle of affluent individuals. It was hazardous to execute paintings worth 400 guilders and more on the chance of securing the interest of one of the few personages actually able to afford it. Therefore, this reliance on such a patron enabled Dou to continue working at the same minutely detailed manner, producing extraordinarily polished works, with no temptation to reduce quality or 'cut corners'. The agreement was also of great benefit to Spiering, who always knew he would have the first pick of this fashionable artist's works. Before long, with Rembrandt firmly out of the picture, Dou's paintings were in high demand and he was one of the few Dutch artists that enjoyed great freedom in his choice of subject matter, allowing him to explore an unusually wide repertoire of subjects. Unlike many of his fellow painters, Dou would never have to specialise in a particular genre.

During the early years of the 1630's, Dou explored the theme of portraying figures in arrested movement — still moments where an individual is suddenly interrupted by the gaze of the viewer. In *Man Interrupted at His Writing*, an elderly scholar glances up from his writing to look directly at us. His pen paused on the paper before him, he sits at his desk, where an open book leans against a globe and a pen case lies on the table edge. A scholar in his study is a recurring theme for Dou, though this panel is clearly the most accomplished painting of the subject, capturing and preserving a single moment in time four centuries ago. The old man's alert pose and whimsical expression signal the arrested moment. Should we feel a sense of guilt for interrupting his work? Dou meticulously renders the scholar's aging features, including thinning

hair and wrinkled skin, hinting at the theme of inevitable time. This subject is emphasised again by the hourglass on the far right, with precisely depicted sand trickling through the narrow neck.

A delicate play of light and shadow on the scholar's face secures our attention, with light pouring in from the left, highlighting the lined forehead and the tip of the man's nose, while his eyes are dimly lit in shadow. The book's open pages provide a subtle reflection of light back on to the scholar's face, reinforcing the psychological intensity of his gaze. Surrounding the figure, there is a plethora of still life props, carefully portrayed in detail. Each item — be it the hourglass, the globe, the tome or the shadowed skull — builds upon the persona of the learned scholar, who should have been left alone to his studies.





Detail



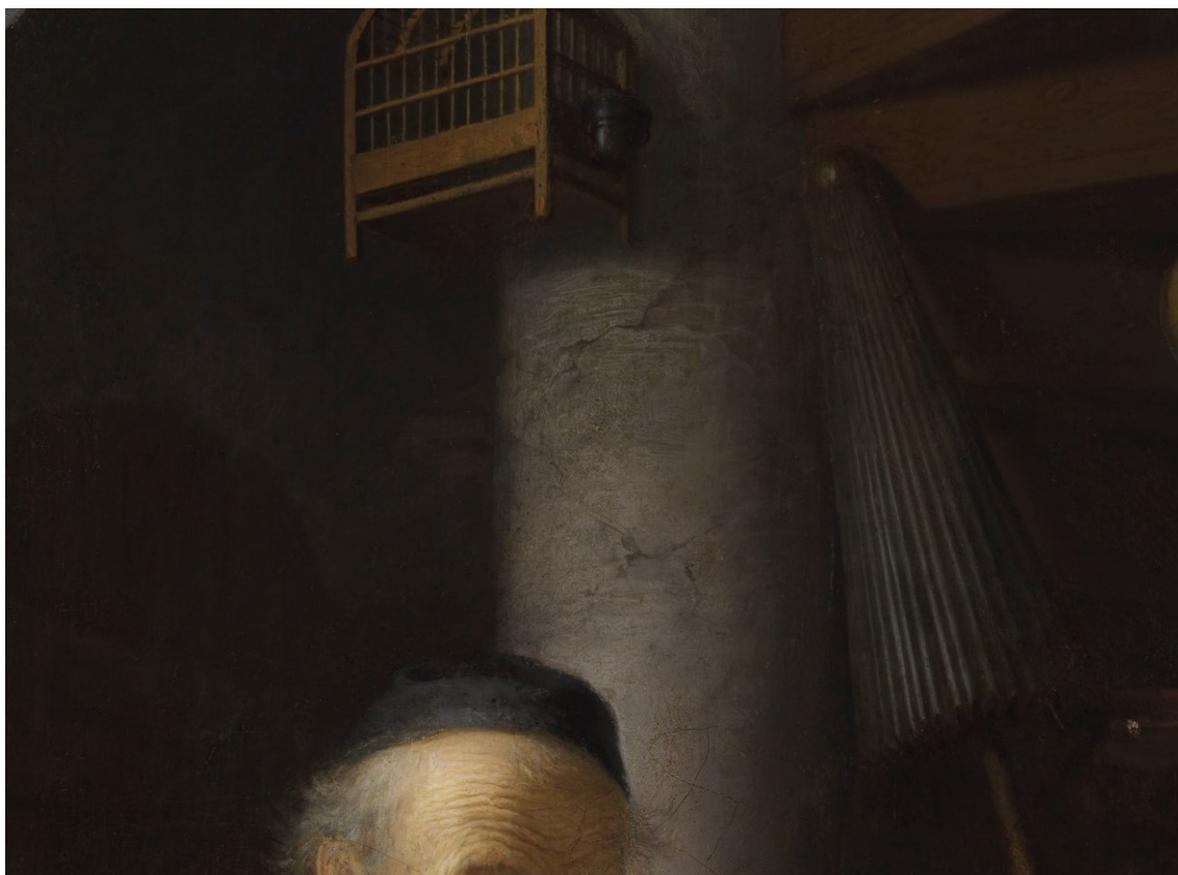
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Rembrandt's 'Portrait of a Scholar', 1631 – revealing the popular tradition of the subject in the Leiden art market

The Cheltenham Self Portrait (1637)



Held today in the Cheltenham Art Gallery, Gloucestershire, this panel reveals the influence of Rembrandt, who famously developed the subject of the self portrait so exclusively in his own oeuvre. Dou would paint about twelve self portraits — far less than his master, who would complete almost a hundred. Dou's 'Cheltenham' Self Portrait is one of his earliest, executed at about the age of thirty-six. It follows Rembrandt's example in portraying features in fine detail, though Dou opts for a more formal and less expressive approach. Whilst Rembrandt's self portraits became increasingly concerned with depicting the inner life and ageing process of the artist, Dou used the subject to celebrate his material, intellectual and social status, representing himself amongst the tools of his trade, including a palette, a plaster cast of a classical figure, while adorned in costly and fashionable clothes.

The self portrait reveals Dou's meticulous technique. He was notorious among sitters for his slow method, reportedly taking days to complete the painting of a single hand, insisting that he made his own brushes to achieve the fineness he required. In this painting, Dou presents himself as a serious and confident artist, using the panel as an ambitious statement about his qualities as a competent master. He selects a three-quarter-length format, rather than a bust or half-length, which stresses the importance of the figure. In spite of the panels' small size, as with most of Dou's works, it promotes a theme of monumentality, as the sitter is placed close to the picture plane in an upright, almost challenging pose. Dou looks directly at us, his head neatly bordered by a double arch in the background, adding to the gravitas of the depiction. The theatrical curtain above his head and the classical column to the right reinforce the monumental theme. Any new visitor to Dou's workshop to inspect his wares, when viewing this self portrait, must have been impressed by the assured and grandiose depiction of an artist at the height of his powers.





Detail



Detail



Detail



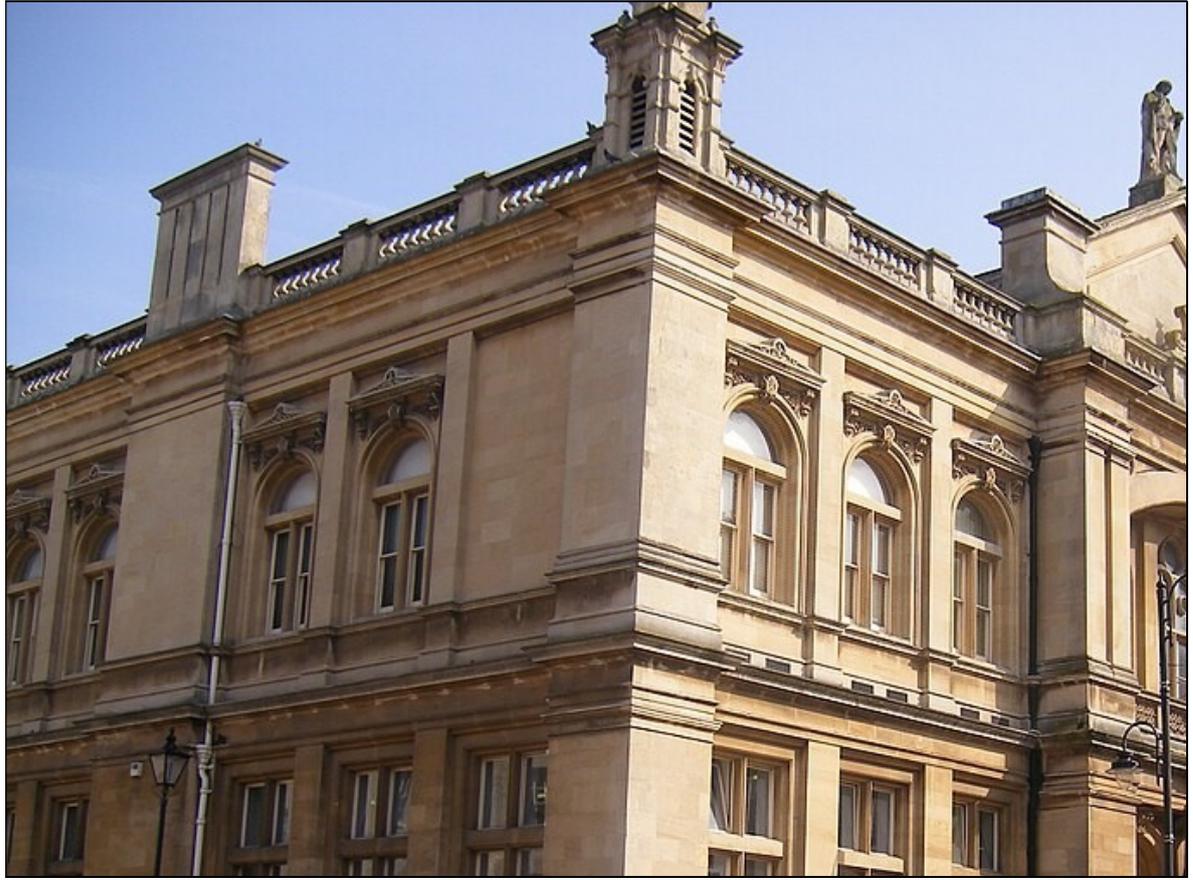
Detail



Detail



One of Rembrandt's self portraits, complete around the same time, private collection



Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

An Interior with a Young Violinist (1637)



Housed in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, *An Interior with Young Violinist* is Dou's first dated work, executed when he was twenty-four years old. Today, it is recognised as one of Dou's masterpieces, offering an excellent example of his early mature style. Its quality is largely achieved through means of the thinly applied brushwork, deftly capturing the natural play of light and dark in the domestic scene. Dou employs a full-length figure and vertical format, as well as an arched top to the panel, giving a monumental quality to the small painting. The use of *chiaroscuro* once again betrays the debt to his former master, conjuring a sense of serenity. Unlike his earlier work, Dou is no longer interested in representing large areas of unmodulated brilliant colour. Instead, he prefers more subdued tones, studying subtle effects of reflected light in a darkened interior.

The panel presents a young musician seated by a table, looking up and momentarily pausing his playing. It reveals Dou's enduring interest in still life, as the large array of scholarly objects surrounding the sitter are replicated with astonishing realism. Many of the props are familiar from his earlier paintings of academics and hermits. The musician is surrounded by books, music and a globe, alluding to the theme of learning that recurs throughout the artist's works and was always popular in Leiden, a distinguished university city. The painting owes a partial debt to Thomas de Keyser's *Portrait of David Bailly*, completed about ten years before. The pose of both figures is similar, although Dou's violinist is not as elegant in his dress as Bailly's. Nonetheless, the musician's high social status is implied not only by his scholarly pursuits, but also by his cloak, sword and boot spurs — all hallmarks of a gentleman.

X-ray studies have uncovered that the artist made several changes during the execution of the panel. Originally, the open tome on the table was much lower and closer to the musician's body. By moving the book higher, Dou could move the figure closer to the viewer's plane, adding depth to the scene. The x-radiography studies have also revealed that the sitter's features were previously completely different, hinting at a last minute change for the choice of sitter, who now appears much younger and fresh-faced. Another major difference is that originally several still-life objects surrounded the model's feet — explaining the awkward position of his right foot, twisting behind him. Before, this foot would have been obscured by the props hiding it. The decision to place fewer objects in the immediate foreground aids the illusion of depth, while enabling Dou to showcase his painterly skills in capturing the pool of light on the pale floorboards before the musician.





Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



A likely source of inspiration: Portrait of David Bailly by Thomas de Keyser, private collection, c. 1627

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End of Sample