

*A Portrait of a Gentleman holding a Watch, from around 1650,
and other New Portraits by Aelbert Cuyp*

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AELBERT CUYP

(1620 – Dordrecht - 1691)

A Portrait of a Gentleman holding a Watch, around 1650

Oil on panel, oval, 37¼ x 29¾ ins. (94.5 x 75.5 cm)

PROVENANCE

Sir Gregory Osborne Page-Turner, (1785-1843)

His sale, Phillips, London 20 April 1815, lot 177 [as self-portrait of Cuyp. £75: 12s], where purchased by Alexander Baring (1774-1848), created Baron Ashburton in 1835, Bath House, London

By descent to the Barons Ashburton, Bath House, London and The Grange, Hampshire

Part of a group of paintings sold by the 5th Baron via Agnew's, London, in 1907, to Alfred de Rothschild (1842-1918)

By descent to Edmund de Rothschild (1916-2009), Exbury House, Hampshire, (1952 and 1957 exhs.)

With Alex Wengraf, London, 1984 and returned

The Trustees of Exbury House, until 2020

Sale, Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury, 8 September 2020, lot 513 [Attrib.to Cuyp]

EXHIBITED

London, Royal Academy, *Winter Exhibition*, 1890, no. 91, as Aelbert Cuyp "The Painter"

London, Royal Academy, *Winter Exhibition: Dutch Picture 1450-1750*, 1952, no. 364, as Cuyp

London, Thos. Agnew and Sons, *European Pictures from an English County*, 1957, no. 3, as Cuyp

Bath, Victoria Art Gallery, *Pictures and Porcelain from the Collection of Edmund L. de Rothschild*, 1988, no. 3.

LITERATURE

J. Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, vol. 5, London, 1834, no. 268, as Aelbert Cuyp

G. F. Waagen, *Kunstwerke und Künstler in England und Paris*, 3 vols., Berlin, 1837, vol. 2, p. 96

G. F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, London, 1838, vol. 2. p. 283, as Cuyp

Lady Jervis White Jervis, ed., *Painting and Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern*, vol. I, London, 1854, p. 325

Waagen, *Treasures of Great Britain, being an Account of the Chief Collections of Paintings, Drawings, Sculptures, Illuminated Mss., etc.*, 3 vols, London, 1854, vol. 2, p. 110

K. Baedeker, ed. *London and its Environs: Handbook for Travellers*, Leipzig, 1878, p. 258 [Bath House, drawing room]

W. Moes, *Iconographia Batava*, Amsterdam, 1897, vol. 1, no. 1871, 3 & 5, as Cuyp self-portrait

Frank Cundall, *The Landscape and Pastoral Painters of Holland*, London, 1891, p. 163, as Cuyp

Emile Michel, "Une famille d'artistes hollandaise: Les Cuyps", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 34, 1892, p. 114 ["agréable"]

C. Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters ...*, vol. 2, London, 1909, pp. 29-30, no. 70, as Cuyp

A. Chong, *Aelbert Cuyp and the Meanings of Landscape*, PhD. dissertation, New York University, 1992, no. C141 [not seen, as not by Cuyp]



1.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a man holding a watch*, around 1650.
Oil on panel (oval), 94.5 x 75.5 cm. Johnny Van Haeften Limited.

The emergence of a new portrait by Aelbert Cuyp provides an opportunity to reevaluate his contributions to the art of portraiture in mid-seventeenth-century Holland – a field the artist is not normally associated with. Although the portrait of a man in question has been recorded since 1815, it eluded extensive discussion in the literature on Cuyp, perhaps because it was very little seen. This writer left it out of the catalogue of Cuyp's genuine works, because it is unsigned and it contains unusual features that do not otherwise occur in the artist's work; I was also unable to see the painting. The portrait's recent appearance at auction and subsequent conservation provides an opportunity for reappraisal.

A half-length figure turns to engage the viewer. In his right hand, he holds a watch, its crystal open. Behind the sitter, stone moldings and pilasters articulate the wall. The brushwork is of exceptional quality: vigorous strokes build up the ruddy tones of the face, a typical feature of Aelbert Cuyp's portraits, while heavy dabs of paint render the beams of light that illuminate the background. Soft pastels highlight the architectural elements, a feature commonly found in the artist's landscapes. Although the artist trained with his father, Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp, and sometimes collaborated with him, this portrait stands entirely apart from the elder Cuyp's rather plain and sober images. The intense light and coloring give the work a strong sense of three-dimensional space and make this one of Aelbert Cuyp's finest portraits.

When the picture first appeared, at the auction of Sir Gregory Page-Turner's collection in 1815, it was called "a Portrait of Himself – for truth, richness of colour, and brilliancy of effect, not inferior to Rembrandt." While the idea of a self-portrait is appealing, there are no known portraits of Aelbert Cuyp, unless one counts the draughtsmen seen from behind working outdoors. The sitter somewhat resembles the figure of Orpheus in an earlier painting at Mount Stuart, which is sometimes adduced as a self-portrait. The 1799 manuscript catalogue of Luton Hoo bluntly describes the painting as "Orpheus charming the animals. This master has ludicrously painted himself in that character playing on the violin."¹ On the other hand, John Smith in 1834 dismissed the idea that the work was a self-portrait, seeing only a man about thirty-five years old, "with dark bushy hair" and holding a locket, a misinterpretation of what is actually a timepiece.



Fig. 2.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a woman holding a fan*, around 1650.
Oil on wood (oval), 95.2 x 75.6 cm.
Private collection.

It appears that the painting has a pendant, which is even more obscure than the portrait of a man.² Here, a woman holding an elegant fan stands near a column (fig. 2). The monochromatic rendering of the architecture and the dramatic beams of light painted with a laden brush are identical to the portrait of the man, which is also of precisely the same size and shape. The two figures seem to inhabit the same space, with light flowing in the same direction and an architectural ensemble filling the center; the woman is clearly accompanied by a column with a base, while the man is backed by moldings along the corner of a wall. The couple both hold finely made objects of considerable value, her highly decorated fan matching his pocket watch. While their faces are appropriately rendered differently, the painting of their hands is nearly identical.

Unfortunately for the romantic observer, this pairing makes the identification of the man as Aelbert Cuyp extremely unlikely. The artist married Cornelia Boschman in 1658, when he was thirty-eight and she was forty-one. Since the pendants surely represent a married couple, Cuyp and Boschman would seem to have been too old to be these sitters.



Fig. 3.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a man, aged 29*. Signed: *Aetatis. 29. / A cuyp.*

Fig. 4.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a woman, aged 23*, 1646. Signed: *AEtatis. 23. 1646. / A. cuyp.*

Both: pen and brush in gray ink on parchment, heightened with white, 20.8 x 16.5 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

The portraits can be compared with an impressive pair of drawings made by Aelbert Cuyp in 1646 (figs. 3, 4), which John Loughman has identified as Johannes Repelaer and Erkenraad Berck.³ Done with pen and brush on prepared parchment – the only instance the artist used the material – the portraits are also oval, and have a powerful directness balanced with an intimacy of gaze. Like the sitter in figure 2, the woman holds a fan, while the man grasps the edge of the oval frame, casting a shadow in our space. This illusionistic device can sometimes be found in Renaissance Italian portraits but most immediately in Rembrandt's print of the preacher Jan Cornelisz Silvius (fig. 5), which dates from the



Fig. 5.
Rembrandt, *Jan Cornelisz Silvius*, 1646. Etching, 27.8 x 18.9 cm. Bartsch no. 280. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

same year as Cuyp's drawings. While Cuyp's portraits are far more restrained than Rembrandt's highly rhetorical portrait, the oval format, trompe-l'oeil gesture, and black-and-white media are common to both, and it seems very possible that Cuyp saw Rembrandt's etching.



Fig. 6.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of Cornelis van Someren, aged 56*, 1649. Oil on wood (octagonal) 68.9 x 60.2 cm. Signed left: *AEtatis: 56: 1649. / A: cuyp. fecit.* National Gallery, London.

The portrait of a man discussed here has much in common with the portrait of Cornelis van Someren at the age of 56 (fig. 6), especially in the rich impasto of the faces and the strongly lit background, although van Someren's portrait has a more golden tonality. The pendant to this portrait is in the Minneapolis Institute of Art.⁴



Fig. 7.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a man with a rifle (probably Jacob Francken)*, around 1651. Oil on wood (oval) 82.8 x 68.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 8.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a woman aged 21 as a hunter (probably Elisabeth Francken)*, 1651. Oil on wood (oval), 80.5 x 68.3 cm, signed left: *AEtatis, 21 / A.cuyp.fecit. / 1651*. Private collection.

Perhaps the closest work is a portrait of a man holding a rifle, now in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 7), in which the face is built up with the same pinkish pigments and the background is similarly streaked with rich swirls of light. In the new portrait, the light has a more obvious source at the upper left, while the Rijksmuseum's portrait is a closer-up, bust-length view of a sitter in fancy dress rather than ordinary attire. The rifleman is paired with a portrait of a woman as a huntress, which is signed and dated 1651 (fig. 8).

These portraits can be plausibly identified as the siblings Jacob and Elisabeth Francken, as they are recorded in the latter's estate in 1678.⁵ The paintings establish an approximate date for the new portrait of a man and its pendant. Aelbert Cuyp employed the same technique and oval format in a portrait of a boy with two sheep (fig. 9).

These portraits are connected by several factors: they are all oval and painted on wood. They have an energetic brushwork and dramatic lighting that is entirely different from the portraits of Jacob Cuyp, which are more sedate and evenly illuminated. The period from 1646 to 1651 demonstrates that Aelbert



Fig. 9.
Aelbert Cuyp, *Portrait of a boy with a sheep*, late 1640s. Oil on wood (oval), 62.5 x 70 cm. Kunstsammlung Rudolf-August Oetker GmbH, Bielefeld.

Cuypp was on his way to becoming a powerful and innovative portraitist. But as we know, his future lay in other genres of art.



Fig. 10. Aelbert Cuypp, *Portrait of Christina Pijll*, around 1650. Oil on canvas, 88 x 75.5, signed lower left: *A. cuyp. fecit.* Private collection, USA (courtesy of Kristin Gray, New York).

Another portrait of an important patron of the Cuypp family has also recently come to light, that of Christina Pijll which has been untraced for nearly a century (fig. 10).⁶ Convincingly signed, the painting shows Aelbert Cuypp's typical brushwork in the face. Two copies of the portrait descended in Christina Pijll's family, and the visage resembles earlier portraits of her by Michiel van Mierevelt (1638), by Mierevelt completed by Jacob Delff (1640), and by Jacob van der Merck (1642). Jacob Cuypp had painted Christina Pijll and her husband, Cornelis van Beveren, around 1627,⁷ while several family members were painted by Aelbert. This demonstrates that portrait commissions from powerful local families could pave the way to more artistically resonant landscape commissions. For example, Aelbert Cuypp's strikingly composed *Avenue at Meerdervoort* (fig. 11) depicts the daughter and two grandsons of Christina Pijll; they are seen standing in the middle distance along the road, with their mansion, the Huis te Meerdervoort, at the left.

After about 1651, Aelbert Cuypp's interest in single portraits dissipates. It is likely that he had to help his father complete commissions shortly before Jacob Cuypp's death in 1652. For example, in 1652, Aelbert copied a portrait of Jacob Trip made by Jacob in 1649, and another of Johan van der Mast from 1631. He also did several single portraits of men in Jacob's basic format and style,⁸ which afforded little opportunity for creativity and experimentation:

Aelbert quickly dropped this line of work. On the other hand, Jacob Cuypp's works dated 1652, the year of his death, show decline in ability or creativity, as they are incisively painted depictions of new subjects.⁹

The first recorded owner of the portrait of a man in figure 1, Sir Gregory Osborne Page-Turner (1785–1843), was only twenty-five when his collection was liquidated at auction. He fell into debt due to unscrupulous art dealers, which forced him to auction his large collection of paintings, miniatures, books and drawings, and sculptures.¹⁰ The auction of this portrait by Cuypp also included Titian's famous *Perseus and Andromeda* (Wallace Collection) as well as a landscape by Jan Both now in the National Gallery, London, which made the highest price in the sale. Nonetheless, Page-Turner soon began buying pictures again and by 1824 had again built an impressive new collection.

The portrait was purchased by the banker Alexander Baring (1774–1848), later Lord Ashburton. In 1836, Gustave Waagen visited Bath House, Baring's residence in London and judiciously noted, "In this department of art, too, Cuypp proves himself an able master, for the conception is very animated, and in impasto and warmth of tone it is very near to Rembrandt, only the flesh is less transparent." And Baedeker's guide to London of 1887 listed the portrait among the attractions of the collection.



Fig. 11. Aelbert Cuypp, *Avenue of trees at Meerdervoort*, around 1650. Oil on canvas, 69.8 x 99 cm, signed lower left. Wallace Collection, London.

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¹ “Rough Catalogue of Pictures: Luton Park” (1799?); manuscript in Mount Stuart; online: artandthecountryhouse.com.

² Provenance: 1st Baron Radstock: Christie’s 12-5-1826 (17) £52.10s. to Rev. Daniel Heneage Finch (1795–1866), Oakham, Rutlandshire (1831 exh.); Christie’s 1-6-1833 (84) unsold; Christie’s 20-6-1834 (45) withdrawn. Private coll., Great Britain.

Refs: *Athenaeum* (2-7-1831), p. 428. Smith 1834, no. 238. *Athenaeum* (15-8-1835), p. 627. Hofstede de Groot 1909, no. 137.

Exhs: British Institution. 1831, no. 9 [“Lady with a Fan,” Rev. Heneage Finch]. British Institution, 1852, no. 9.

³ John Loughman, “New light on some portraits by Aelbert Cuyp,” *Burlington Magazine* 150 (2008), p. 584, identified the sitters as Johannes Repelaer (1617–1651) and Erkenraad Berck (1624–1650). While the ages match reasonably well (Erkenraad’s is off by a year), the likenesses are only generally similar to portraits of the couple painted by Jacob Cuyp in the same year, when the couple was married. Jacob Cuyp’s portraits bear the Repelaer and Berck arms which makes their identities certain; see *Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp (1594–1652)* (Dordrechts Museum, 2002), no. 29, repr.; p. 178, nos. 65, 66.

⁴ *Portrait of Anna Blocken, aged 49, 1649*. Oil on wood. The identification of the two sitters was made by Loughman 2008, pp. 584–85.

⁵ Rijksmuseum website, citing the inventory published by John Loughman in the Provenance Index, Archival Inventory N-1475 [<https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/>]

⁶ Prov: August Janssen, Amsterdam, sold to Goudstikker, Amsterdam (1919–23 exhs.); Edward A. Faust and Anna Busch Faust, St. Louis (by 1925); by descent.

Refs: E. Hutchings, “The Faust collection,” *International Studio* 81 (1925), p. 442, repr. Chong 1992, no. C132 [not seen].

Exhs: Goudstikker exhs: Maatschappij voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (1919–20), no. 16, repr. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, et al. (1920), no. 14, repr. City Art Museum of St. Louis (1922), no. 28, repr. Anderson Gallery, New York (1923), no. 30.

⁷ Jacob Cuyp inserted portraits of the couple into a view of The Hague by David Vinckboons dated 1622; Dordrecht 2002, no. 8, repr.

⁸ These include portraits of Nicolaes Stoop and Margaretha de Veer (Geldersch Landschap en Kasteelen, Arnhem) and a portrait of a man holding a book (Sotheby’s 9-7-2015, lot 169). See Chong 1992, p. 531, no. 97.

⁹ A boy holding a flute and a glass of wine (Dordrecht 2002, no. 40) and a pair of paintings showing a man holding a goose and a woman holding a rooster (Sotheby’s, New York 1-10-2020, lot 55).

¹⁰ See discussion in Provenance Index: Sale Catalog Br-1275. *The Diary of Joseph Farrington*, edited by K. Garlick, et al. (New Haven, 1978): 19-6-1813.

