



FRANS HALS STUDIES

# Frans Hals

Iconography – Technique – Reputation

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

Persexemplaar

Frans Hals (1582/83-1666) is rightfully considered one of the most important Dutch painters of the seventeenth century. His portraits are admired for their virtuoso brushwork and their seemingly spontaneous character. This volume, with fourteen contributions by twenty-six specialists on Hals's paintings and his artistic network in Haarlem and beyond, presents a rich palette of new research.

The authors introduce subjects such as the artist's clientele – from clergymen and fellow painters to governors of charitable institutions – as well as stylistic and technical aspects of individual paintings. The results of recent restorations are discussed, along with how advanced digital technologies contribute to our understanding of the painter's style and artistic development. A final section is dedicated to the rediscovery of Frans Hals in the second half of the nineteenth century and to the subsequent art historical debate among connoisseurs about the artist's oeuvre.

*Frans Hals: Iconography – Technique – Reputation* is the first volume in the Frans Hals Studies book series and is richly illustrated with close to two hundred colour illustrations.

**Norbert E. Middelkoop** is the senior curator of paintings, prints and drawings at the Amsterdam Museum and the former curator of old masters at the Frans Hals Museum.

**Rudi E.O. Ekkart** is the former director of the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague, the Netherlands.

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Persexemplaar



Frans Hals

# Frans Hals Studies

*Frans Hals Studies* provides a platform for new research into Dutch 17th-century art, exploring Haarlem as a center of artistic innovation. In collaboration with the Frans Hals Museum, this book series aims to initiate, stimulate, and facilitate art historical and material-technical research on the work of Frans Hals, his milieu, and the impact his work had on contemporaries and later artists.

The book series includes academic research originating from the Frans Hals Museum's research program, focusing on the workshop practices of Frans Hals and his Haarlem contemporaries, as well as other relevant contexts. The series also welcomes book proposals from scholars not affiliated with the Frans Hals Museum. It caters to an international audience of art historians, museum curators, conservators, librarians, and other specialists.





# Frans Hals

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Edited by  
Norbert E. Middelkoop and  
Rudi E.O. Ekkart

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# Table of Contents

Foreword	7
<i>Marrigje Rikken</i>	
Frans Hals: A Survey of Current Research	9
<i>Norbert E. Middelkoop</i>	
<b>Iconography</b>	
1. The Religion(s) of Frans Hals	14
<i>Frans Grijzenhout</i>	
2. Peeckelhaering and the Performance of Race	31
<i>Christopher D.M. Atkins</i>	
3. Painted Stitches: Embroidery and the Paintings of Frans Hals	49
<i>Marika van Roon</i>	
4. More than Decoration: The Map in Frans Hals's <i>Regents of St Elisabeth's Hospital</i>	65
<i>Liesbeth Abraham and Koos Levy-van Halm</i>	
5. Willem or Balthasar? The <i>Portrait of a Member of the Coymans Family</i> by Frans Hals Reconsidered	82
<i>Pieter Biesboer</i>	
6. Frans Hals's Portraits of Painters: A Reconnaissance	92
<i>Norbert E. Middelkoop</i>	
<b>Technique</b>	
7. A Box Full of Research: Early Twentieth-Century Documentation on the Scientific Investigation and Restoration of the Eight Group Portraits by Frans Hals	110
<i>Mireille te Marvelde, Liesbeth Abraham, Herman van Putten, and Michiel Franken</i>	
8. The New York <i>Malle Babbe</i> : Original, Studio Work, or Forgery?	130
<i>Anna Tummers, Arie Wallert, Robert G. Erdmann, Katja Kleinert, Babette Hartweg, Dorothy Mahon, Silvia Centeno, Roger Groves, Andrei Anisimov, and Joris Dik</i>	
9. Looking at Frans Hals in the Digital Age: The Benefits of Detailed Comparisons	155
<i>Claus Grimm</i>	

10. Lost Lines: New Light on the Painting Technique of Frans Hals	171
<i>Herman van Putten, Liesbeth Abraham and Mireille te Marvelde</i>	
11. Unfinished Business? Comparing Hals's Late <i>Regents</i> and <i>Regentesses</i>	183
<i>Liesbeth Abraham</i>	

## Reputation

12. From a Parisian Dining Room to a German Private Museum: Frans Hals in the Collections of Count André Mniszech and Marcus Kappel	194
<i>Emilie den Tonkelaar</i>	
13. 'Because you simply cannot argue about art with a chemist': Scientific Research on Frans Hals's Paintings in the Netherlands during the 1920s	211
<i>Michiel Franken</i>	
14. Frans Hals Connoisseurs and Exhibitions: From Thoré to Today	221
<i>John Bezold</i>	

Bibliography	244
Index on Persons' Names	263
Index on Locations and Organizations	270



# Foreword

The reputation of Frans Hals (1582/83–1666) has experienced high peaks and deep troughs. In his own time, his innovative, ‘rough’ painting style was recognized by authors of travelogues and fellow artists. But his work went swiftly out of favour after his death. Hals fell into obscurity: he was no longer included automatically in historical surveys of seventeenth-century Dutch art and hardly any research was done into his life and work. This situation persisted for a long time, only taking a turn for the better around the mid-nineteenth century, when the French journalist and art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807–1869) rediscovered Hals. In his wake, the artistic community – this time modern artists – once more took up the painter’s work and Hals came in for renewed study.<sup>1</sup> Yet even with the involvement of these figures, Hals’s reputation still lagged behind those of Rembrandt and Vermeer, which had been rising sharply since the nineteenth century; the same was true of scholarship on Hals in comparison with the work on Rembrandt and Vermeer.

As described in the introduction to this edited volume, which surveys the current state of Hals scholarship, the Frans Hals Museum has carried out a great deal of research into its namesake since its foundation. Nevertheless, many questions remain, to which Hals specialists have yet to find unambiguous answers. The Frans Hals Museum – holder of the largest and most important collection of Frans Hals paintings in the world – therefore decided to establish a scholarly platform, with the aim of initiating, stimulating, collating and disseminating art historical and material-technical research into Frans Hals. Publications in the accompanying *Frans Hals Studies* series will be an important means of enabling this.

There could be no better moment to launch this series than a period in which a major Frans Hals exhibition has been showing at no fewer than three of the most important museums for seventeenth-century Dutch art. The exhibition opened at the National Gallery in London (30 September 2023–21 January 2024), before travelling to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (15 February 2024–9 June 2024) and then – in a different form, placing Hals more in context – to the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (12 July 2024–3 November 2024).

These events, mounted in special collaboration with the Frans Hals Museum, prompted the presentations on the current state of Hals research by an international network of scholars. This exchange of knowledge took place on January 8 and 9 2023 and would not have been possible without the generous support of the Rijksmuseum. I warmly thank Norbert Middelkoop, who took on the substantive organization of bringing the scholars together with such verve, and Giovanna di Galbo, who

1 This topic will be discussed in a later volume in the *Frans Hals Studies* series.

meticulously oversaw the practical arrangements. Almost 100 scholars and other participants were offered a rich programme and the opportunity to stroll around the galleries of the Frans Hals Museum at leisure to contemplate and discuss the fifteen paintings by Hals in the museum's collection display, including eight group portraits, as well as seven temporary loans.<sup>2</sup>

I am most grateful to all contributors who agreed to share their research and ideas for this volume. This volume would not have come about without the hard work of again Norbert Middelkoop, who continued to encourage all the authors and to edit their respective contributions. I likewise extend my gratitude to Rudi Ekkart for also commenting on the papers.

Together, the contributions collected here provide an excellent overview of research into the work of Frans Hals, which can be divided into three sections: iconography, technique and reputation. As such, this collection is not only an eminently suitable first instalment in the planned series of books; it can also function as a starting point for further research facilitated by the Frans Hals Museum.

Marrigje Rikken

Former Head of Collections and Exhibitions, Frans Hals Museum

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the eleven Hals paintings listed by Slive 1970–1974, vol. 2 (introductory pages), the museum is home to the *Portrait of Theodorus Schrevelius* (ibid., vol. 3, no. 8), acquired in 2003; *Portrait of a Man, presumably Gerrit Jansz van Santen* (ibid., no. 139), on loan from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage since 2008; *Portrait of a Woman* (ibid., no. D78), on loan since 2011; *Portrait of a Man* (ibid., no. 199), on loan since 2013. Furthermore, the *All Civic Guard Paintings* exhibition included the 'Meagre Company' from the Rijksmuseum (ibid., no. 80), while *Newcomers: Flemish Artists in Haarlem 1580–1630*, included *Portrait of a Man* (ibid., no. D37), *Portrait of a Man* (ibid., no. 9), *Two Fisher Boys* (ibid., no. D16) and *Portraits of Lucas de Clercq and Feijntje van Steenkiste* (ibid., nos. 104–105).



# Frans Hals: A Survey of Current Research

From the moment Haarlem's art collection moved from the town hall to its current premises in 1913, the Frans Hals Museum has been a renowned centre of knowledge on the artist whose name it bears. This is, first of all, because of the richness of its holdings, which include the eight group portraits painted for Haarlem institutions, making the museum the best possible place to study Hals's artistic development throughout his career; but secondly, because many of its staff – from curators and conservators to directors – have been involved in the study of the master and his work.

Gerrit Gratama (1874–1965), director from 1912 to 1946, saw to it that the new Frans Hals Museum housed a small paintings restoration studio from the start. Having himself trained as a painter, he carried out minor treatments there, while also promoting and overseeing the overall restoration of the civic guard and governors group portraits. This work was carried out by several members of the De Wild family of conservators, though not without controversy regarding the 'modern' methods used, including scientific analysis. Gratama also curated the first exhibition devoted to Frans Hals in Europe in 1937, marking the 75th anniversary of the museum since it opened in the Haarlem town hall.<sup>1</sup> His book on the master, written the following year, finally appeared in 1943.<sup>2</sup>

His successor Henk Baard (1906–2000), director from 1946 to 1972, also wrote on Frans Hals. His book on Hals's civic guard paintings was published in 1949 and – unusually for the time – contained large colour reproductions of details.<sup>3</sup> On the occasion of the museum's 100th anniversary in 1962, Baard organized the second Frans Hals exhibition in Haarlem, for which he could rely on Seymour Slive (1920–2014), who spent a year with his family living in Aerdenhout in order to study the master.<sup>4</sup> While Gerda Kurtz (1899–1989), the director of the Haarlem Municipal Archives, played a major role in facilitating his study of archival sources, long-time 'scientific assistant' Carla van Hees (1905–?) – in practice the museum's first curator

1 See Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 1937.

2 Gratama 1943.

3 Baard 1949.

4 Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 1962.

– helped prepare the entries for the show’s catalogue. Baard’s 1981 book on Hals is dedicated to Slive, who by then had published his three volumes on the master.<sup>5</sup>

It was Seymour Slive who took the initiative for the next major Hals exhibition, which opened in 1989 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, before travelling to the Royal Academy of Arts in London and finishing up at the Frans Hals Museum in 1990.<sup>6</sup> That Haarlem was added to the show’s itinerary was largely thanks to the successful lobbying of Derk Snoep (1935–2005), the museum’s director from 1983 to 2000, and Pieter Biesboer (b. 1944), Curator of Old Masters between 1976 and 2009. This time, the exhibition catalogue not only contained Slive’s introduction and entries but also important essays by Biesboer and other Frans Hals Museum staff members, Ella Hendriks (b. 1960), Koos Levy-van Halm (b. 1940) and Liesbeth Abraham (b. 1962), while Irene van Thiel-Stroman (1932–2021) presented no fewer than 190 documents relating to Hals, mainly retrieved from the city archives – a treasure trove cherished by researchers to this day.

Prior to the exhibition on the civic guard in Holland (1988), Hals’s five Haarlem civic guard paintings were analysed and restored by Anne van Grevenstein (b. 1947), head of the paintings conservation studio from 1983 to 1987, and her team.<sup>7</sup> Her former assistant and successor Ella Hendriks led the studio between 1988 and 1999, and together with Koos Levy she studied 59 of the 86 Hals paintings present in the 1990 exhibition, which culminated in an important report on Hals’s painting technique and materials.<sup>8</sup> Hendriks was succeeded by her former assistant Liesbeth Abraham and intern Mireille te Marvelde (b. 1962), who still work for the museum. Abraham and te Marvelde were in charge of the recent research and conservation project involving Hals’s three governors group portraits between 2013 and 2017, together with Herman van Putten (b. 1961), a project that was presented to the public halfway through the exhibition *Frans Hals: Work in Progress* (2015). As a consequence of the extensive expertise present in the Frans Hals Museum’s paintings conservation studio, fellow institutions regularly ask for advice before starting treatment on their Halses.<sup>9</sup>

Pieter Biesboer’s scholarly articles on the master over the years, based on thorough archive research, have been pivotal to our art historical knowledge, enriching our view of Hals’s world and clientele.<sup>10</sup> He not only convincingly identified various sitters

5 Baard 1981 and Slive 1970–74.

6 Cat. Exhib. Washington / London / Haarlem 1989–90.

7 See Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 1988. Preliminary reports on the individual paintings were published in Middelkoop and Van Grevenstein 1989.

8 Hendriks and Levy-van Halm 1991.

9 Liesbeth Abraham was involved in the restorations of the *Portrait of a Man* from the Dijon Musée des Beaux Arts (2016) and of the three Frans Hals paintings at the Sao Paolo Museo de Arte (2022).

10 Biesboer 1989–90.

but also created an invaluable source for future research with his book *Collections of Paintings in Haarlem 1572–1745*, published in 2001.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, several exhibitions at the Frans Hals Museum focused on the artist's pioneering achievements in the broader context of seventeenth-century Haarlem (and Dutch) art and culture, a line continued under Anna Tummers (b. 1974), Curator of Old Masters until 2020.<sup>12</sup> She also explored Hals's relation to famous predecessors and contemporaries, placing his so-called 'rough style' in a wider, international context. The 2013 exhibition on the subject, *Frans Hals: Eye to Eye with Rembrandt, Rubens and Titian*, marked the 100th anniversary of the museum in its current premises. She also initiated two research projects on Hals-related attribution issues, which assessed relatively new technical research methods as well as advanced data visualization tools.<sup>13</sup> In 2018–19, lastly, the museum hosted the exhibition *Frans Hals and the Moderns*, curated by Marrigje Rikken (b. 1984), the museum's Head of Collections from 2017 to 2024.<sup>14</sup> The show explored how Hals's rough style was recognized and applauded in the second half of the nineteenth century by painters like Edouard Manet, Max Liebermann and Vincent van Gogh.

The previous symposium devoted to Frans Hals at the Frans Hals Museum took place in 2013, coinciding with the *Eye to Eye* exhibition. More recently, in 2019, the symposium *Hals Meets Manet, Singer Sargent, Van Gogh* accompanied the show *Frans Hals and the Moderns*.<sup>15</sup> Last year's gathering, which took place on January 8th and 9th 2023 under the title *Frans Hals: A Survey of Current Research*, set out to present the latest study findings on Hals, preceding the 2023–24 exhibitions on the master in London, Amsterdam and Berlin. Most of those papers are published in the present volume.<sup>16</sup> Three subsequent Curators of Old Masters, three paintings conservators and a freelance art historian, all of whom have previously or are still working for the Frans Hals Museum, are represented as contributors – evidence, if

11 See Nichols, De Belie and Biesboer 2018; Biesboer 2023; as well as Biesboer 2001.

12 See for instance Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 1988; Cat. Exhib. Haarlem/Munich 2008–09; Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 2011–12; Cat. Exhib. Haarlem 2017.

13 *Frans Hals or not Frans Hals?* (2016–18) and – together with Robert Erdmann – *21st Century Connoisseurship: Smart Tools for the Analysis of Seventeenth-Century Painting* (2018–22), which was funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO); see Tummers *et al.* 2019a–b and Tummers and Erdmann 2024.

14 This project was initiated by Anna Tummers.

15 A volume of essays from this symposium will be published in the near future.

16 The papers presented by Jaap van der Veen and Friso Lammertse, 'Frans Hals's Workshop and his "Volck"', and Bart Cornelis, 'More than Meets the Eye: Hals's *Portrait of a Man* from Chatsworth', were published in Cornelis *et al.* 2023–24, pp. 62–79 (*passim*) and pp. 120–127, respectively. The joint paper of Liesbeth Abraham and Koos Levy-van Halm, 'More than Decoration: The Map in Frans Hals's *Regents of St Elisabeth's Hospital*', could not be presented at the symposium but is published in the current volume.

it were needed, that the building up, cherishing and sharing of knowledge on the master at the museum that bears his name is considered as natural and important as ever.

However, these are not the only contributors. It is our great fortune to have so many scholars who cherish a passion for Frans Hals represented in this publication. We are extremely grateful that they have been willing to share their knowledge with us. Our special thanks are also owed to Rudi Ekkart, whose additional comments on the essays were welcomed and appreciated by the authors. Some papers have been slightly adapted or enlarged following the opening of the Frans Hals exhibition at the National Gallery in London in September 2023, and the publication of the accompanying book.<sup>17</sup>

More than 350 years after Frans Hals's death, it is gratifying to see that attention for the great Haarlem master and his legacy is still very much alive among scholars, museum visitors and other art lovers.

Norbert E. Middelkoop  
Curator of Old Masters, Frans Hals Museum, 2021–2024  
Amsterdam, Spring 2024

<sup>17</sup> Cornelis *et al.* 2023–24.