

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

CS0378

KAREL VAN MANDER III (Delft 1610-1670 Copenhagen)

Old woman holding a clay pot and wooden spoon

c. 1640

Oil on oak panel, 28 ½ x 21 ⅝ (72.8 x 54.2 cm)



PROVENANCE

Possibly General von Firck, his sale, Nyborg, Denmark, 28 May 1782, lot 38 (as Dutch master 'An old woman with a porridge bowl');ⁱ

Count Andrey Rostopchin (1813-1892), Moscow, by latest 1850 (according to exhibition record as Nicolas Maas), possibly by inheritance from his father Count Fyodor Rostopchin (1763-1826);ⁱⁱ

His sale, Messrs. Christie and Manson, London, 21 January 1854, lot 103 (as Maes 'An old woman, eating porridge');

Possibly George Moffatt (1806-1878), Goodrich Court, near Ross-on-Wye;

Thence by descent Mrs Trafford (née Moffatt), removed from Goodrich Court in 1946, Property of Mrs Trafford, Christie's, London, 12 July 1946, lot 76 to Kaye (as Rembrandt);

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 12 December 1947, lot 66 to Gray (as Rembrandt);

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 26 June 1959, lot 113 (as Carel van der Pluym);

With Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna, 1959 (as School of Rembrandt);

Collection Karl Rutter, Vienna;

Thence by descent, Property from the Rutter Collection, Vienna, Sotheby's, London, 3 May 2017, lot 209 (as Follower of Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn);

There acquired by the present owner.

Private Collection, London.

EXHIBITED

Moscow, Galerie du Comte Rastapchine, *Catalogue des Portraits, Tableaux, ... de la Galerie du Comte Rastapchine*, 1850, no. 129 (as Nicolas Maas).ⁱⁱⁱ

St. Petersburg, Galerie du Comte Rastapchine, *Catalogue des Tableaux, Marbres ... de la Galerie du Comte Rastapchine*, 1852, no. 168 (as Paul Rembrandt van Ryn).

Vienna, Galerie Sanct Lucas, *Ausstellung Gemälde alter Meister. Neuerwerbungen*, December 1959 – January 1960 (as 'Schule Rembrandt' with alternative attribution to Abraham van Dyck or Isack van Ostade).

DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The dating of the present panel to c. 1640 is supported by the dendrochronological analysis by Professor Dr. Klein, Hamburg. The painting is made of three oak boards, the wood originating

from the Polish/Baltic regions. Assuming a median of 15 sapwood rings and 2 years seasoning makes a creation of the artwork plausible from 1634 onwards.^{iv}

This monumental painting of an old woman in half-length, holding a red-fired clay pot and wooden spoon in her hands, was once part of the Collection of Count Rostopchin, the first private collection opened to the Russian general public in the mid-nineteenth century. At the time it was considered to be a work either by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn or Nicolas Maes. Over the centuries the picture changed hands and so did the attributions, ranging from Rembrandt to Carel van der Pluym, Abraham van Dijck, and as a last resort Isaac van Ostade. However, none of these theories withstood the test of time. It is therefore even more exciting that the painting can now be convincingly identified as an original work by Karel van Mander III (1610-1670), the most important court painter of the seventeenth century at the royal court of Copenhagen, Denmark, a contemporary early follower of Rembrandt (1606-1669) and his school.

Karel van Mander III was the grandson of Karel van Mander I (1548-1606), the painter and art theorist most famous for his biographical publication on early Netherlandish painters, *Het Schilder-boeck*, published in Haarlem in 1604, and he was the eldest son of painter Karel van Mander II (1579-1623), who worked for the Danish court and died in Delft in 1623. Following the death of the latter, the family moved back to Copenhagen. In 1630, Karel van Mander III received his first commission, to paint the portrait of the Danish King Christian IV (1577-1648). With the King's permission, the young artist went on an extended study trip to Rome, via the Netherlands and France in 1636. When he returned to Copenhagen by June 1639 at the latest, for a brief period of time he painted a number of works that clearly show the influence of Rembrandt and his pupils, such as *Aaron as high priest*, dated c. 1640 and which once was attributed to Govaert Flinck^v. Karel van Mander III died in Copenhagen in 1670.^{vi} Works by the artist are rare. The great majority of his surviving oeuvre belongs to the Danish public and Royal Collections.

The recognition of authorship of the present art work is predominantly based on the use of the same model by Karel van Mander III in another of his paintings, *Portrait of an old woman*, preserved in the Statens Museum of Kunst, Copenhagen^{vii}, where a large part of extant works by the artist can be seen today. On closer examination one can observe that the facial features and expression of both female sitters are identical and treated with heightened realism. The forehead wrinkles, the frown and glabellar lines are carefully studied and executed with a variety of short loose dabs ranging from grey-green hues to a warm brown with the addition of white. In particular, the woman's drooping right eye-lid and raised eyebrow leave no doubt that it is one and the same old woman, most probably painted from life.

As for the composition both paintings depict the sitter against a monochrome background in a restricted colour range of earth pigments plus the use of lead white. In each case the woman

is avoiding the viewer's direct gaze and appears to be distracted from her current undertaking. In the present work she holds a cooking pot and a wooden spoon, while in the Copenhagen picture her left hand is placed on top of an object that seems to be a kitchen utensil. Although the headgear differs, they wear a similar plain dress with long sleeves of a heavy material, opening at bust level to reveal the white undergarment that is ruffled at the collar. Another common feature would be the big strong hands and their broad handling, a striking feature that also occurs in the above-mentioned *Aaron as high priest*.

The woman in the Copenhagen picture has traditionally been identified as Maren Michelsdatter Drakenberg, née Bagge, wife of the legendary Norwegian sailor Christian Drakenberg (1626-1772) who was thought to be depicted in the companion piece of an *Old Man*, Statens Museum of Kunst, Copenhagen^{viii}; however the dates do not add up to strengthen the case.^{ix} Nevertheless, it is tempting to believe that the selected woman is a real person who posed for the artist given the distinctive facial features, the contemporary everyday costume, and the repeated appearance in Karel van Mander III's oeuvre. The curiosity for the study of old age could have been instigated by Rembrandt who was only three years his senior. As Juliette Roding points out, 'the van Rijn and van Mander families may have already had contact in the late 1620s, because in 1628 Engel Rooswijck [Karel van Mander III's uncle and his guardian] was living in Leiden at the same time as Rembrandt.'^x In that same year, Rembrandt produced his earliest signed and dated etching, known as *Rembrandt's mother* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1961-1195). In the Leiden period, Rembrandt showed a keen interest in the human face, its expressions and signs of age, in the form of *tronies*, head or half-length character studies from life.^{xi} This practice of *tronies* would later serve as teaching tool and products for the open market as an additional source of income in Rembrandt's own Amsterdam workshop, set up in 1635.^{xii} It is in the following year that Karel van Mander III visited Amsterdam and therefore could have experienced Rembrandt's work first hand.^{xiii} As an additional source of inspiration regarding subject matter, he might have also seen *Elderly woman in an interior eating porridge*, dated c. 1631-35, a painting by one of Rembrandt's most talented early pupils in Leiden, Gerrit Dou (1613-1675); it appears to be one of the earliest depiction of an old woman eating porridge.^{xiv}

Given the potential sources of influence, Karel van Mander III delivers a striking interpretation of his own accord. The present old woman is presented with arresting realism while pursuing a banal everyday activity; this fills the panel with imposing monumentality in large-scale, close to the picture plane and set in a solid pyramidal structure lit from the back. As suggested, she is most probably an ordinary low-ranking woman, whose weathered face has been marked by the hardships of the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648), raging at the time. Her stern expression provides no further clue to a religious purpose or moral meaning of the painting, nor does she

exude the idea of romanticised poverty; her clothing is modest but not threadbare and the cooking pot (unlike in Dou's painting) is not chipped.

However, her interrupted meal prompts the thought that the painting might be an allegorical reference to the sense of taste. It is noticeable that Karel van Mander III gives equal importance to both the face and the convincing depiction of the glazed earthenware quality of the clay pot, adding light reflections on the rim and on the inside of the wooden spoon to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. A seventeenth-century cooking pot of similar shape and with a single handle, preserved in the VASA museum, Stockholm, illustrates the truthfulness to the present object and its geographical allocation.^{xv} Karel van Mander III is known to have painted the *Five Senses*, and extant examples of *Allegory of hearing* and *Allegory of sight* (inv. no. KMSsp799), both in the Statens Museum of Kunst, Copenhagen, provide evidence. Interestingly, *An allegory of taste: a young man drinking from a silver tankard* was one of the most recent works to appear on the art market and was sold at auction at Christie's, London, in 2004. As in the present painting, the well-observed object invites parallels to the highly realistic sensation of the metallic sheen of the silver-coloured tankard.

Indeed, one of the most innovative qualities of the present work lies in the original approach in handling different textures. The experimental and sensitive thin, patchy and translucent brushwork for the flesh tones reminds of the paper-like quality of fragile wrinkled skin; this is in stark contrast to the strong hands emphasised by the broad handling of the paint and close attention to the dirty finger nails. The equally broad handling of the textiles however, underpins the modesty of the outfit, and the lower part of the body almost melts into the background. With the depiction of the cooking pot and spoon, Karel van Mander III shows off his mastery in still life. Such visual lessons Karel van Mander III could have absorbed from his extensive travels abroad, both in Italy and the Netherlands, and in particular from the Rembrandt school.

I am grateful to David de Witt and Volker Manuth for the insightful conversations with regard to the Rembrandt School that allowed me to identify the artist. I am equally grateful to Juliette Roding, author of the recently published oeuvre catalogue on Karel van Mander III (in J. Roding et al., *Karel van Mander. Library and Oeuvre*, Frederiksborg 2020); she endorsed the attribution to Karel van Mander III based on photographs (verbal communication, 25 November 2020).

Sonja Vilsmeier

NOTES ON PROVENANCE

The earliest possible record of the painting might be the public sale of the collection of General von Firck from May 1782 in Nyborg, Denmark. The description of an old woman eating porridge, the support given as on panel, and the measurement, provided as a life-size figure painted in half-length, and lastly the sale location in Denmark all suggest it might be one and the same panel. The sale record indicates that General von Firck also owned another 'gammel Kone' (old woman) painted by Karel van Mander III. There is no further indication which member of the Firck family was the first owner; a possibility is Johann von Fircks (died 1667), a captain in the Danish army in 1641, who distinguished himself in the Dano-Swedish War (1657-58) and thereafter was promoted to Major General.^{xvi} Famously, Karel van Mander painted a series of 'sea heroes' in a portrait sitting session in Copenhagen (a few of the surviving portraits are today preserved in Skokloster, Sweden).^{xvii} This possible encounter could offer an explanation as to how General von Fircks might have met the artist and acquired paintings from him. If true, this means the painting would have stayed in family ownership until the sale at the end of the eighteenth century. By then, however, the name of the originator was lost.

With certainty, *The Old Woman holding a clay pot* was in the possession of the Rostopchin family by latest 1850, as it is listed in the Moscow exhibition catalogue. The major part of the collection of Count Fyodor Rostopchin (1763-1826) was acquired during his séjourn in Paris between the years 1817 and 1823 (Fig. 12). His son, Count Andrey Rostopchin, inherited the collection and added to it with acquisitions in Italy and France during the years 1846 and 1847 (Fig. 13).^{xviii} Therefore, it is probable that the present painting had been acquired by Count Fyodor Rostopchin before it passed on by descent to his son. Count Fyodor Rostopchin was a high-ranking official at the Russian court. During the reign of Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) he was the Governor-General of Moscow during the French invasion of Russia, an episode described in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

Owning art in Russia was the privilege of the very few. This changed with Count Fyodor Rostopchin's son, Count Andrey Rostopchin, who in the mid-nineteenth century was the first to display his picture collection publicly. It was made accessible for general viewing in the rooms of the Demouthe Hotel on the River Moyka by the Politseysky (Police) Bridge, St Petersburg. The Rostopchin collection contained a wide range of Dutch old masters and was already celebrated in Russia. Viewing was an obligatory social activity for the upper classes at the time. The collection is still under-researched to this date, but a publication was put together in French in 1850 and 1852 (*op. cit.*) before the collection appeared on the art market. Another example from the collection and of a similar subject matter, an old woman with a burning candle, is in the possession of the Hermitage in St Petersburg: Matthias Stom, *Allegory of miserliness (Avaritia)* (inv. no. 3081).^{xix}

The back of the panel bears a number of wax seal collectors' marks: one black and five red ones, some in the form of crowned coat of arms, indicating noble ownership. Unfortunately, not all of them are still in a legible state of preservation and identifiable. One of the red wax seals is a crowned monogram, possibly bearing the initials MB, the shield decorated with two orders of honour. It is, however, possible to connect one of these wax seals with the coat of arms of the House of Kryukov, an ancient Russian noble family, which must have owned the painting before it came into the possession of the Rostopchins, i.e. before 1850. As illustrated the shield (Figs. 14, 15) is divided into four parts: the first depicts an octagonal gold star; the second part, a moon crescent with its horns facing upwards; the third part a flower; the fourth part, a sword and two hooks are laid crosswise. The shield is crowned with an ordinary noble helmet with a noble crown on top of it. Even though the legibility of the red wax seal has suffered, the symbols do appear to match exactly. Nothing has yet come to light to the author about this noble family and its collection.

ⁱ I am grateful to Angela Jager for this provenance information located on Getty Provenance Index. The description reads: 'en gammel Kone med en Grød=Skaal, malet paa Træe, af een af de store Nederlandske Mester, half Figur i Legems Størrelse' (an old woman with a porridge bowl, painted on wood, by one of the great Dutch masters, half figure in body size). Getty Provenance Index, last accessed 10 December 2020, <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html>.

ⁱⁱ The spelling of the Russian noble family varies. For the purpose of this document the following format has been chosen: Count Fyodor Rostopchin and his son, Count Andrey Rostopchin, unless stated differently in the cited documents.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Régis Confavreux, Paris, for consulting the Bibliothèque l'INHA Paris for the exhibition record of 1850 and 1852 on my behalf.

^{iv} Letter by Prof. Dr. habil. Peter Klein, Hamburg, dated 27 May 2017.

^v K. van Mander III, *Aaron as high priest*, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

^{vi} J. Roding, Gerson digital, chapter 4.5.2 Court art at the time of Karel van Mander III, last accessed 20 April 2020, <http://gersondenmark.rkdmonographs.nl/4.-gerson-extended-2013-juliette-roding/4.5-the-patronage-of-christian-iv/4.5.2-court-art-at-the-time-of-karel-van-mander-iii>. For further information on the artist, please refer to J. Roding, *Karel van Mander III (1609-1670) hofschilder van Christiaan IV en Frederik III. Kunst, netwerken, verzameling*, Hilversum 2014, or more recently, J. Roding et al., *Karel van Mander. A Dynasty of Artists*, vol. 3, Frederiksborg 2020 and J. Roding et al., *Karel van Mander III. Library and Oeuvre*, vol. 4, Frederiksborg 2020.

^{vii} K. van Mander III, *Portrait of an old woman*, oil on panel, 65 x 48 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

^{viii} K. van Mander III, *Portrait of an old Man*, oil on panel, 64.5 x 49 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

^{ix} The SMK museum website refers to the Norwegian sailor Christian Jacobson Drakenberg (1626-1772), who the legend says died at the age of 145 and who in advanced age married Maren Michelsdatter Bagge. In ca. 1640, which is the suggested dating of the present panel, Drakenberg would have still been an adolescent. See Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, last accessed 19 April 2020: <https://collection.smk.dk/#/en/detail/KMS1381>.

^x J. Roding et al., *Karl van Mander. A Dynasty of Artists*, Frederiksborg 2020, p. 87.

^{xi} E. Hinterding et al., *Rembrandt the Printmaker*, London 2000, pp. 86-88, no. 3. Christian Vogelaar highlights that Rembrandt's early graphic output was 'not so much for sale as to master the difficult technique of etching and the art of representing fabrics and ageing skin.' See also C. Vogelaar, 'Rembrandt's Mother,' in *Young Rembrandt*, edited by C. Brown et al., Oxford 2019, pp. 118-121.

^{xii} For the definition and function of Rembrandt's *tronies*, see J. van der Veen, 'Faces from Life: Tronies and Portraits in Rembrandt's Painted Oeuvre,' in *Rembrandt a Genius and his Impact*, ed. by Albert Blankert, Melbourne 1997, pp. 71-73.

^{xiii} Roding believes it is in Amsterdam where Karel van Mander III could have seen Rembrandt's *Rape of Ganymede*, dated c. 1635. Karel van Mander III made a version of the *Rape of Ganymede*, today known through an engraving by Albert Haelwegh, dated c. 1645, which is a clear visual testament of Rembrandt's influence on

Karel van Mander III. See for further details J. Roding, *Karel van Mander. A Dynasty of Artists*, Frederiksborg 2020, pp. 87-95. Jager has undertaken further research on Karel van Mander III which confirms his stay in Amsterdam, providing documentary evidence in her recent publication, see A. Jager, 'A reconstruction of The Five Senses by Karel van Mander III,' *RKD Bulletin 2021/1* online edition, last accessed 31 August 2021: <https://bulletin.rkd.nl/en/20211/reconstruction-five-senses-karel-van-mander-iii/>.

^{xiv} Gerrit Dou, *An elderly woman, seated by a window at her spinning wheel, eating porridge*, sold at Sotheby's, New York, 27 Jan 2011, lot 151 for \$ 5,346,500 incl. premium (est. \$ 2-3 mio.). According to the RKD image database it appears to be the earliest depiction of an old woman eating porridge out of an earthenware cooking pot. In the 1650s the subject appears more frequently, see examples by Quiringh van Brekelenkam, Gabriel Metsu, Jan Steen or Pieter Cornelisz Slingelandt, interestingly, all Leiden-born artists.

^{xv} I am grateful to Vivian Etting, Senior Researcher and Curator, Nationalmuseets, Copenhagen, for sharing her expertise about the clay pot. She confirmed that these types of pots are extremely common in the Danish finds and all over Scandinavia from the late Middle Ages up to the 18th century (Email communication, 17 May 2020).

^{xvi} General Johan von Fircks, see biography in the *Dansk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 5, last accessed 10 December 2020: <http://runeberg.org/dbl/5/0168.html>

^{xvii} J. Roding, *Karel van Mander III (1609-1670) hofschilder van Christiaan IV en Frederik III. Kunst, netwerken, verzameling*, Hilversum 2014, pp. 75-78.

^{xviii} Introduction to *Catalogue des Portraits, Tableaux, ... de la Galerie du Comte Rastapchine*, Moscou 1850.

^{xix} I am grateful to Irina Sokolova for informing me about the collection of Count Rostopchin. I. Sokolova, *The Russian Passion for Dutch Painting of the Golden Age*, Leiden and Boston 2015, pp. 51-52; an image of the artwork by Matthias Stom is accessible on the website of the Hermitage Museum, listed under the title *Old Woman with a Candle*. The Corpus Rembrandt informs us that Count Fyodor Rostopchin once owned the *Man on the windowsill*, The Taft Museum, Cincinnati, bought in the Marivaux sale, Paris 1806 as Rembrandt, but later sold in London 1844. See for further details, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings IV*, Dordrecht 2005, p. 409.