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GÖTEBORGS KONSTMUSEUM EN DEL AV GÖTEBORGS STADS KULTURFÖRVALTNING

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Artist	<b>Rembrandt van Rijn</b> (Dutch, 1606 - 1669)
Title	The Knight with the Falcon
Dating	1660-talet
Technique/Material	Oil on canvas
Dimensions	98,5 x 79 cm Djup: 2 cm Ram: 134 x 115 x 11,5 cm
Acquisition	Gift of Gustaf Werner and others, 1921
Category	Oil painting
Inventory Number	GKM 0698
Display Status	On display in The Rembrandt Room (Room 8)
Bookmarkable URL	<a href="https://emp-web-34.zetcom.ch:443/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface!">https://emp-web-34.zetcom.ch:443/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface!</a>
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Description **Provenance** **Exhibition History** **Bibliography**

/The Canon: Perspectives on Swedish Art Historiography/

Today, Rembrandt is regarded as one of art history's great masters, but this has not always been the case. Rembrandt achieved fame during his lifetime as a painter of portraits and historical motifs, culminating with *The Night Watch* from 1642. After that, things went downhill for him. His style became unfashionable, and he was affected by personal losses and economic difficulties. With the advent of modernism, Rembrandt again gained a higher status. Particularly his late portraits, in a free and expressive style, were considered artistically innovative.

As Rembrandt's status has increased, the attribution of works to him has become a point of contention. The modern idea of a sole creator, which guides attributions, is a poor match for the artistic practices of Rembrandt's age. At this time, the artist's name was a trademark for a workshop in which several assistants created works in the master's style or carried out parts of the painting. However, *The Knight with the Falcon* is with certainty painted by Rembrandt. The portrait belongs to a series of religious works in which Rembrandt emphasizes the humanity of the saints.

/The Canon: Perspectives on Swedish Art Historiography/

The bearded knight meets our gaze with an eye that seems to look through everything. He is depicted in a full-face, half-length view, standing just to the right of centre. He wears a dark cloak and a gleaming crucifix on a ribbon around his neck. On his head he has a red cap with a black border topped by an ostrich feather. On his gloved left hand, held up in front of him, sits a hooded falcon. His right hand rests on his hip, with his thumb in his belt. In the background we glimpse a horse in profile and a groom.

The background with its horse and groom is characterized by movement, while the knight exudes a stoic calm. The scene is shrouded in shadow, but a bright light falls on the man's face, illuminating the left half of his face and leaving the right in shadow. The knight stares straight at the viewer. Luminous, as if lifted by an inner light above the bounds of physical reality, as if he had seen hollowness of the material world .

In his quiet nobility, the figure recalls figures of Christ. As Björn Fredlund noted in his contribution to a Swedish volume on Rembrandt in his day (Görel Cavalli-Björkman et al., eds., *Rembrandt och hans tid: Människan i centrum*, Stockholm 1992, 210–13), there is considerable evidence that it was one of Rembrandt's suite of religious motifs from the late 1650s and early 1660s, and that the central figure is St Bavo. What set these religious images apart was that Rembrandt forsook the Roman Catholic tradition of showing saints, elevated, with shining halos to emphasize each saint's humanity. St Bavo's expression says that material wealth is a mere nothing. Suddenly his outfit appears almost comic. In a poignant way, Rembrandt skewers mankind's vanity and transience in an image of a man faced with the question of the meaning of his own existence.

The painting was executed in an expressive manner, with the alternating pastose and thin, translucent areas so typical of late Rembrandt. The saddle in the background is sketchily drawn in dark colours, while the man's face is more powerfully picked out. Rembrandt has used the foundation's brown as the mid tone, from which he built up lighter and darker areas. The sketch was done straight onto the foundation in dark brushstrokes. To give the dark areas greater depth, he applied earth-colours in multiple layers. Finally, he painted highlights in ceruse scattered across the face, the plume, and the mantle and crucifix. The painting is done entirely in

earth-tones and black, with accents of red in the cap, the falcon's hood, and the cloth the man has over his arm.

The Knight with the Falcon calls to mind the biblical motifs that Rembrandt kept returning to, often using models from the area around Rozengracht, the street in the craftsmen's district on the outskirts of Amsterdam where he lived from 1659. The same face appears in several paintings from the 1650s and 1660s: from Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer (1653, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), A Bearded Man in a Cap (late 1650s, National Gallery, London), and Portrait of a Bearded Man (1661, Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg) it is plain that Rembrandt painted the same model on several occasions.

Previously, the painting was thought to be the likeness of Floris V, Count of Holland (1254–1296), a national hero who was captured when out hawking in an attack engineered by Edward I of England and Guy de Dampierre, Count of Flanders (R. Wilhelm Valentiner, »Rembrandt's Conception of Historical Portraiture«, Art Quarterly, 11, 1948). Another theory says that the knight was the mediaeval Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, who wrote a manual of falconry.

But now he is believed to be St Bavo (622–659), or Allowijn as he was first known, the patron saint of Ghent and Haarlem. St Bavo is usually depicted with a falcon on his wrist—a reference to the episode in his youth when he stole a falcon and was sentenced to death for it, but managed to escape. The mantle, crucifix, and plumed cap all number among St Bavo's attributes. St Bavo came from a wealthy family near Ghent. After a dissolute life, he converted to Christianity, gave away his possessions to the poor and the Church, and became a penitent hermit.

Perhaps, as Fredlund suggests, it is the moment of conversion that Rembrandt has portrayed, the very second when the handsome, rich man suddenly sees the emptiness around him. If so, then there are parallels with Caravaggio's *The Conversion of St Paul* (1600) in the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, in which the apostle-to-be, Paul, then a soldier in the Roman army, having been struck by divine light and fallen from his saddle, hears a voice that tells him to change his life. Fredlund highlights Cornelis Visscher's copperplate of St Bavo (1650) as a possible source of inspiration, for it shows the saint with the same attributes, with cap, robe, and a falcon on his arm. The copperplate was done after a drawing by Pieter Soutman, who had worked as an engraver for Rubens.

Rembrandt's series of religious portraits from the late 1650s and early 1660s are among the artist's most expressive. Based on studies of live models, he painted Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Evangelists and Apostles, monks, and saints with great sensitivity, expressing their humanity without compromising their symbolic importance to Christianity. How much of Rembrandt's own experience can be read into the resignation of St Bavo, a man who has come to a dead end in life and suddenly becomes aware of another dimension of existence?

Rembrandt had indeed enjoyed considerable success, but also met with endless mischances. He married Saskia van Uylenburgh and they had four children, of whom all except the youngest, Titus, died in infancy. In 1639, Rembrandt bought a house in Breestraat in an affluent neighbourhood in Amsterdam, which is now a museum. After his wife died in 1642, Rembrandt's production and income dwindled, and he was declared bankrupt in 1656. When his house and art collection were auctioned off, he was forced to move to more modest accommodation in Rozengracht. Along with Rembrandt's housekeeper and mistress, Hendrickje Stoffels, Titus established an art-dealership in 1660 to which his father delivered his works.

At the exhibition *Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits* (2005) at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the painting was exhibited next to *St Bartholomew* (1661, Getty Museum), which depicts an aged man with a knife in his hand (the symbol of his martyrdom), giving *The Knight* an illustrative context.

*The Knight with the Falcon* was conserved by Mark Leonard, chief conservator at the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles, in 2008–2009. Three layers of varnish and dirt, and umpteen retouches, were removed, making the picture clearer and giving the colours a stronger lustre. Damaged parts were retouched and a new varnish applied. CT scans made it possible to follow the progress of Rembrandt's work, for example the changes he made in the clothing. It was found that the figure had previously had a red cloak with a white collar, one which bore some resemblance to what the saint is wearing in Peter Paul Rubens's painting *St Bavo about to Receive the Monastic Habit at Ghent* (1626) in St Bavo Cathedral, although in Rubens's painting he is wearing armour under his cloak. There is an oil sketch for the painting, *The Crusader* (National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen), in which the same model wears similar headgear but a red cloak. The fact that the Gothenburg picture has cusped at the edges, as unpainted canvas does when it is stretched, shows that it has not been cropped. The format is largely identical to several of Rembrandt's religious portraits from around 1660, which strengthens the case for the painting being part of that series. The gilded frame is from the early eighteenth century in the Régence style.

The Museum's acquisition of *The Knight with the Falcon* in 1921 was made possible by a substantial gift of 300,000 kronor from the textile manufacturer and art collector Gustaf Werner. The Museum's director and the chairman of the board managed to raise the remaining 75,000 kronor from a number of art enthusiasts in Gothenburg.

Kristoffer Arvidsson from *The Collection Gothenburg Museum of Art*, Gothenburg 2014