

ADRIAEN THOMASZ. KEY

(Antwerp c. 1544 - Antwerp, after 1589)

Portrait of a Bearded Gentleman, Bust-Length, in a Black Doublet with a White Lace Ruff, Painted Oval

signed 'ATK' (in ligature) and dated '1574' (upper left), inscribed 'AETA: 48' (upper right)
oil on panel
75.6 x 60.3 cm (29³/₄ x 23³/₄ in)

Provenance: Anonymous sale, Fiévez, Brussels, 3-4 July 1919 [=1st day], lot 121;
Jules Porgès (1838-1921), Paris;
with Jacques Goudstikker, Amsterdam, before 1931;
looted by the Nazi authorities, July 1940;
recovered by the Allies, 1945;
in the custody of the Dutch Government;
restituted in February 2006 to the heir of Jacques Goudstikker.

Exhibitions: Utrecht, Centraal Museum, *Kersttentoonstelling van werken van eenige oude schilderigen uit de collectie Goudstikker*, 1925-1926, no. 17.

Literature: C. Wright, *Paintings in Dutch Museums. An Index of Oil Paintings in Public Collections in The Netherlands by Artists born before 1870*, London, 1980, p. 373, as attributed to Frans Pourbus I;
Old Master Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (The Netherlandish Office for the Fine Arts), The Hague, 1992, p. 243, no. 2106, illustrated, as Frans Pourbus (1).

RECENTLY RE-ATTRIBUTED TO ADRIAEN THOMASZ. Key on the discovery of his monogram in the upper left hand corner, this sensitive and naturalistic depiction of a bearded gentleman, was traditionally considered the work of Frans Pourbus the Elder. The works of Key and Pourbus have historically been difficult to distinguish.

Key has here imbued his subject with a palpable humanity, giving him a stronger presence than his otherwise plain features and clothing would suggest. The keen attention paid to the details of the man's appearance, from the wayward strands of his beard climbing up his cheek to the lines on his skin and the shadows around his eyes, seem to be designed to kindle the viewer's empathy for the sitter.

The sitter wears a black doublet with very little ornamentation, against which his starched white ruff stands out. Although rather severe to modern eyes, the all black ensemble was very popular in sixteenth century Europe, spreading initially from the Spanish court where it was almost compulsory wear. Black was soon adopted by the middle classes and came to denote professionalism and respectability.

Pourbus' *Portrait of a Man* from the Johann Gotzkowski Collection in the Hermitage, similarly depicts a bearded, middle-aged man dressed in black (fig. 1). The format of the picture is half-length rather than bust-length and reveals more of the man's costume and surroundings. The props detailed around him lend him a scholarly air, whereas our portrait is more enigmatic, revealing nothing about the man's profession or aspirations. The Hermitage portrait was acquired in 1764 by Catherine the Great (1729-1796) from the Berlin merchant Johann Gotzkowski (1710-1775). His collection of 225 paintings, mostly by Dutch and Flemish masters, laid the foundation the Hermitage collection as we know it today.

The present painting was owned by Jacques Goudstikker (1897-1940), the internationally renowned Netherlandish dealer of Old Master paintings, prior to 1931. Goudstikker was the director of an Amsterdam gallery inherited from his father, which flourished between the two World Wars. His major interest was in

early Dutch figure painting and portraiture, although he introduced many Italian, German and Flemish works to the Amsterdam market.

Adriaen Thomasz. Key was a relative of Willem Key and both artists were noted for their sober portraits of famous people Key was a pupil of Lambert Lombard and became a member of the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke in 1568. Key's portraits are remarkable for their acute observation.



Frans Pourbus the Elder, *Portrait of a Man*, between 1545 and 1581, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg; Collection of Johann Gotzkowski, Berlin, 1764 (Figure 1)

