

CORNELIS JONSON VAN CEULEN

(London 1593 - Utrecht 1661)

Portrait of Thomas Cletcher, Half-Length

oil on canvas
79.7 x 64.1 cm (31³/₈ x 25¹/₄ in)

Provenance: Nicolle Collection, Copenhagen.

Exhibited: Copenhagen, Danish Museum of Fine Art, Autumn 1920, no. 64 as 'Bartholomeus van der Helst'.

Literature: K. Madsen, *Catalogue of a Collection of Paintings Exhibited in the Danish Museum of Fine Art*, Copenhagen, 1920, pp. 112-3, no. 64, as 'Bartholomeus van der Helst'.

THIS PORTRAIT OF THE JEWELLER AND GOLD-smith Thomas Cletcher (1598-1666) can be dated to around 1660 and comprises part of the output originating from Cornelis Jonson van Ceulen's later Dutch period. His paintings from these decades are considered to be among his finest, characterised by an elegance reminiscent of Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), coupled with an expert rendering of physiognomy and facial expression. The sitter can be seen here with a cheerfully enigmatic look upon his face. The simplicity of his costume and pose focus the attention fully on his skilfully depicted features: a refined Roman nose and beard worn after the fashion of the time. A discreet gold ring sits on the fourth finger of his left hand alluding to his trade as a successful goldsmith and jeweller.

Despite the conservative nature of Cletcher's pose, the liveliness of his expression makes him appear relaxed yet subtly commanding. The conventional pyramidal shape of his body, interrupted by the inclusion of his hand for expressive purposes, exemplifies van Ceulen's careful meticulousness which can also be seen in his portrayal of Apolonius Veth two decades earlier (fig. 1). The contrast between the two portraits is revealing: both undeniably exhibit an extraordinary attention to detail as well as a very human empathy with the sitter. Yet, this present portrait seems far more confident in its use of colour and tonality for the modelling of Cletcher's face. The overall result is an assured and life-like composition.

Van Ceulen would have known Thomas Cletcher through Daniel Mijtens (c.1590-c.1647), a Dutch artist active in England with whom he worked. In his early career, van Ceulen often produced exacting copies of works by other artists among them, Mijtens' celebrated portrait of Charles I (1629; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Mijtens had married Cletcher's sister, Gratia and his portrait of his brother-in-law in The Hague's Gemeentemuseum confirms the identity of the sitter in the present painting. Van Ceulen may also have known Cletcher through connections in his own family. In his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, of 1762, Horace Walpole notes that one of the artist's sisters was married to Nicholas Russell or Roussel, of Bruges, who was the jeweller to Kings James and Charles I.

Van Ceulen was born in London after his parents had fled their native Netherlands to avoid religious persecution. He was a highly successful portraitist who came into his own when he returned to the Northern Netherlands at the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1643 and he lived there until his death in 1661.

We are grateful to Sturla Gudlaugsson and Fred Meijer of the Rijksbureau Kunsthistorische Documentatie for their attribution of the painting to van Ceulen and their identification of the sitter as Thomas Cletcher.



Cornelis Jonson van Ceulen, *Apolonius Veth*, 1644, The Tate Gallery, London (Figure 1)

