Fig. 1 Exhibition of the *Portrait of Catharina Hooft with Her Nurse* (cat. 2) at the Gemäldegalerie Berlin-Dahlem, ca. 1967–77

Introduction
Frans Hals in Berlin

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Nowadays, we find Frans Hals's work highly captivating particularly because of the unconstrained immediacy of the brushwork and the expressiveness of his depictions. The figures in Hals's paintings appear genuine, natural, and sincere—qualities that are becoming increasingly valued in contemporary society, geared as it is toward self-improvement.

It is precisely those traits, however, that meant Hals's art was long regarded as second-rate and "inferior";[1] by the late eighteenth century, his works were considered to display a slapdash, "negligible" execution[2] and classed as unacceptable to the era's prevailing tastes.[3] Fending off financial loss, leading French art dealer Jean-Baptiste Pierre Lebrun (1748–1813), for instance, admonished that in his view Hals's hastily and carelessly painted works would only fetch appropriately low prices, for they lacked the requisite meticulous care.[4] Nevertheless, Lebrun still bought and sold works by Frans Hals, including two now in the collection of the Berlin Gemäldegalerie.[5]

During the nineteenth century, Frans Hals was gradually rediscovered, which little by little triggered a fresh appreciation of his importance as one of the greatest seventeenth-century Dutch painters. To begin with, the 1862 inauguration of Haarlem's Stedelijk Museum van Schilderijen en Oudheden made the painter's magnificent group portraits accessible to the general public. Art scholar and critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807–69) was among the first visitors with a professional background to explore the museum. His groundbreaking research on Dutch artists of the seventeenth century played a major part in Frans Hals's rediscovery at the time and the recognition of his importance. In two landmark publications from 1868 and 1869, Thoré-Bürger elucidated the outstanding role Frans Hals played within the Dutch school, providing a new perspective on his artistic approach, which had previously often been attacked.[6] In addition, he viewed Frans Hals as a fitting role model for contemporary artists. As an advisor and mediator, Thoré-Bürger also promoted targeted purchases of Hals's paintings and helped ensure that they were integrated into prominent art collections.[7]

This growing interest and renewed appreciation were also manifested in the rising prices regularly fetched by Hals's works. In 1865, for example, after a fierce bidding war between Lord Hertford and Baron James de Rothschild, *The Laughing Cavalier* (cat. 20) was sold to Hertford for the incredible sum of 51,000 francs.[8] As well as being an extremely high price for the era, it was also several times that paid for works by Hals during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The auction marked a decisive turning point in the reception of Hals's work: "the boom was around the corner," to cite Hals scholar Seymour Slive.[9] As early as 1914, Wilhelm

von Bode commented that, while it was hard to acquire a good Rembrandt, it was even more difficult to buy a good Hals.[10]

The I. Internationale Kunstausstellung (First International Art Exhibition), held in Munich in 1869, was another important milestone in the engagement with Frans Hals. At the time, there were still scarcely any works by Hals in collections open to the public. The Munich exhibition showed five of his paintings from private collections at once, including *Malle Babbe* from the Barthold Suermondt Collection (cat. 45), which attained cult status not least due to the copy that Gustave Courbet made while in Munich (cat. 48). Thoré-Bürger was also enthusiastic about this "impassioned painting" and expressed his hope that Hals would one day be represented in Paris too.[11] Indeed, in that very same year, another painting by Hals, *Young Woman ("La Bohémienne")* (cat. 7), was donated to the Louvre as part of the La Caze Collection. Seven years later, the National Gallery in London acquired its first work by Frans Hals.[12]

The collection history of the works by Hals held in Berlin offers an emblematic reflection of this shifting appreciation. That makes it a fitting prism through which to gain a clearer view when recounting the intriguing narrative of the rediscovery and reception of Frans Hals's oeuvre, as well as the wrangling over valuations and attributions of his works. Despite wartime losses, revised views on the authorship of some works, the deaccessioning of one painting, and a still unsolved theft, Berlin still has one of the most extensive and highest-quality Frans Hals's collections the world over. Noteworthy is that Berlin has not only amassed a comparatively large number of Hals's works, but also began acquiring them at a surprisingly early stage.

When the Berlin Gemäldegalerie was founded in 1830, its collection already included what was then believed to be an outstanding work by Frans Hals: *Portrait of a Married Couple in the Park* (fig. 2). This imposing portrait, originally belonging to the Prussian royal family, is now attributed to the Flemish painter Gonzales Coques (1614–84).[13] In 1830, however, Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794–1868), the museum's first director, still listed it as an authentic work by Hals.[14] This attribution, which surprises scholars today, testifies to the limited knowledge of Hals's oeuvre in that period, partly because virtually none of his works figured in the major courtly collections or their publicly accessible counterparts.[15] Waagen rapidly made up for this deficit and secured important works by the artist for the Berlin Gemäldegalerie. Between 1840 and 1869, he acquired a total of five paintings by Hals.[16] In 1838, Waagen had already made an unsuccessful attempt to purchase a *Portrait of a Man* by Frans Hals that he considered to be among "the good and more painstakingly painted works" by the artist. That acquisition was, however, thwarted by conservator Johann Jakob Schlesinger, then a member of the acquisition commission, who considered the painting to be "a mediocre, highly besmeared work" and voted decisively against the purchase.[17] The unquestionably deep-seated dislike of the Haarlem painter apparent in Schlesinger's words also reflects the long-established, then still widespread, view of Hals as a "slipshod" artist.

Fig. 2 Gonzales Coques, *Portrait of a Married Couple in the Park*, 1655–60, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 3 Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Lady*, ca. 1638–40, formerly Gemäldegalerie Berlin

Just two years later, in 1840, a pair of portraits by Frans Hals depicting an unknown man (cat. 56) and an unknown woman (cat. 25) were acquired for the Berlin Gemäldegalerie. The paintings came from the collection of the Baltic Baron Karl von Essen and were purchased together for the small sum of 300 reichsthalers.[18] Interestingly, during discussions on the purchase, almost everyone involved on the acquisition committee agreed that work by Hals would represent a valuable addition to the collection.[19] From the outset, the Berlin museum aspired to focus on art-historical considerations in assembling its collection rather than reflecting the private predilections of a collector or ruler, and by this point in time, Hals certainly numbered among the canon of important Dutch masters.

In 1843, the extensive collection of Berlin publisher Georg Andreas Reimer was sold at auction.[20] Despite international interest, the bids fell well short of expectations, enabling the Berlin picture gallery to acquire an impressive thirty-two paintings.[21] To this end, Waagen had submitted buying recommendations with a price limit. Almost all of the paintings he proposed, including two by Frans Hals, could be purchased. The prices paid for the works by Hals—153 thalers in the case of *Portrait of a Man* (cat. 13);[22] 21 thalers and 15 silver groschen for *Portrait of Johannes Acronius* (cat. 14)[23]—meant that they entered the collection of the Berlin Gemäldegalerie "for next to nothing in today's terms."[24] Sixteen years later, in 1869, *Portrait of a Lady* (fig. 3) was also added to the museum's collection for a ridiculously low price. Auguste Schneiderreit purchased this oval portrait for only 60 reichsthalers.[25] Although today it is classed as an original work by Hals,[26] it seems to have been held in scant regard in Berlin at the time. Wilhelm Bode (1845–1929) had already considered including the portrait in a possible barter transaction in 1876. Ultimately, however, the work remained in storage until 1880,[27] when it was restored and displayed in the collection. In 1883, a permanent loan of the picture to the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts was arranged. That may have been because the painting had been cropped, as would have been immediately apparent when looking at the trimmed painted oval frame, which would have disturbed the intended visual effect.[28] It is no longer possible to determine precisely the state of the work at the time, as it was stolen in Düsseldorf in 1972 and has not yet reappeared.[29]

The 1874 purchase of the Suermondt Collection, when Julius Meyer (1830–93) was the museum's director, proved to be a real stroke of luck.[30] Over the course of just a few years, Barthold Suermondt (1818–78), an Utrecht-born entrepreneur and art collector later based in Aachen, had assembled an outstanding collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings, including works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Van Goyen, and Frans Hals.[31] Suermondt met Thoré-Bürger in 1859. The relationship between the two quickly developed into "an alliance of mutual support when it came to studying, promoting, and collecting paintings by the artists they both admired."[32] Like Vermeer, Frans Hals numbered among the still undiscovered painters they held in particular esteem. Through lively dialogue with Thoré-Bürger, Suermondt became one of the leading art collectors in mainland Europe and brought together a notable seven works by Frans Hals, still before the prices for the artist's work rose sharply.[33] However, the impact of the financial crisis forced Suermondt to part with most of his artworks. In 1874, he sold his collection to the Königliche Museen (Royal Museums) in Berlin. As a consequence, the entire lot of 218 paintings, including the seven works by Frans Hals, entered the Gemäldegalerie.[34] Several of these pictures still rank among the artist's major works, including *Portrait of Catharina Hooft with Her Nurse* (cat. 2), *Boy with Flute* (cat. 42), and *Malle Babbe* (cat. 45).

During Julius Meyer's time as museum director, one last painting by Hals was acquired for the Berlin Gemäldegalerie in 1877. *Portrait of Tyman Oosdorp* (cat. 29) was bought for just 9,000 marks from the Liphart zu Ratshoff Collection.[35] That meant the gallery now owned twelve paintings attributed to Frans Hals and thus, along with Haarlem's Stedelijk Museum van Schilderijen en Oudheden, already boasted the largest and most outstanding collection of Hals's works (fig. 4). The acquisition of paintings by Hals for the Berlin collection was therefore concluded at a time when other large collections

were only just beginning to take notice of the artist. After 1877, however, the Berlin-based selection of Frans Hals's works gradually began to dwindle for a number of reasons.

Firstly, *The Merry Trio* from the Suermondt Collection was classed as a freely interpreted copy and by 1878 was no longer attributed to Hals.[36] A similar situation arose in 1904 for *The Merry Drinker* (cat. 54), also from the Suermondt Collection, which was recognized as a work by Judith Leyster (1609–60).

Finally, in October 1927, *Portrait of an Elderly Man* (fig. 5),[37] also from the Suermondt Collection, was exchanged for Rubens's *Landscape with Cows and Duck Hunters* in a transaction with the art dealers Kunsthandlung Böhler-Cassirer.[38] Four years after hyperinflation in Germany, Berlin no longer had sufficient funds to buy a top-notch work like the Rubens landscape. There was apparently a conviction that Hals was sufficiently represented in the collection and that the loss of one of his works could therefore be tolerated. Wilhelm Valentiner also expressed this assumption when writing to Paul Reinhardt, the new owner of the Berlin portrait, congratulating him on purchasing this excellent work. In the letter, he also expressed his great astonishment at the trade: "I never thought that he [Bode] would let this great portrait by Frans Hals, of his late period, go." Valentiner's surprise stemmed from the fact, he commented, that paintings from this period were extremely rare and document the extraordinary stylistic development in Frans Hals's late work.[39] Others shared this view. In 1929, by which time the portrait had been sold on to the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen,[40] an anonymous author took stock, noting that from the perspective of the art market it had been a poor deal for Berlin, as well as being detrimental for the collection from an artistic point of view.[41]

During the Second World War, the Berlin Gemäldegalerie suffered extensive losses: a total of 434 paintings deposited in the Friedrichshain antiaircraft bunker were most likely destroyed, or at least they remain missing to this day. Those works included the painting formerly attributed to Hals, *The Merry Trio* (p. 206, fig. 3),[42] as well as *Banquet in a Park* (fig. 6).[43] The latter had been donated to the Gemäldegalerie in 1912 as a work by Dirck

Fig. 4 Display at the Gemäldegalerie in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin, with works by Frans Hals, 1904

Fig. 5 Frans Hals, *Portrait of an Elderly Man*, 1655–60, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Fig. 6 Frans Hals (?), *Banquet in a Park*, ca. 1610–24, formerly Gemäldegalerie Berlin

Hals (see cat. 50). Wilhelm von Bode suggested that very year that the painting should instead be attributed to the young Frans Hals.[44] Other art historians, however, argued that it was more likely a work by Willem Pietersz Buytewech (1591–1624) and this attribution initially prevailed.[45] Due to its loss, there is now no means of studying the original to ascertain whether the attribution to Frans Hals is correct. However, scholars increasingly take the view that the painting was most probably Hals's earliest known work.[46] Its loss is thus all the more painful.

The last alteration to the attribution of a painting from the Berlin collection considered to be by Frans Hals was in 1956 and concerned the *Portrait of Johannes Acronius* (cat. 14). It must have been at this point that the respected Hals scholar Seymour Slive made a verbal statement to the Gemäldegalerie expressing his belief that the work was not an authentic painting from Hals's hand.[47] However, it is fair to assume that Slive did not have an opportunity to study the original work at this time, as the museum's paintings had been placed into storage for safekeeping during the Second World War and were not returned to Berlin until the last quarter of 1956. Nevertheless, the *Portrait of Johannes Acronius* had its original attribution removed and was entered in the records as a copy. Although Slive did ultimately include the painting in his 1974 monograph as an indubitably authentic work by Hals,[48] it remained in the gallery's depot, and the 1956 appraisal that removed its attribution from Hals went uncorrected for decades. Only in connection with this 2024 Frans Hals exhibition was the small painting examined in detail and reclassed in the inventory as an authentic work by Hals.

1 Gaethgens and Paul 1997, vol. 1, p. 54.
2 For example, the art dealer Nieuwenhuis in 1834. See Jowell 1989, p. 63n26.
3 On the history of the reception of Frans Hals, see in detail Jowell 1974; Jowell 1989.
4 Lebrun 1792–6, vol. 1, p. 71; see also Jowell 1989, p. 62.
5 The reference is to *Portrait of a Woman* (cat. 25) and *Portrait of Jan Miense Molenaer (?)* (cat. 56). Auction in Paris (Jean-Baptiste Pierre Lebrun), May 3, 1786 (and subsequent days), lot 22 (Lugt nos. 4025, 4040).
6 Thoré-Bürger 1868; Thoré-Bürger 1869.
7 Jowell 2018.
8 Packer 2021c, pp. 61–3.
9 Slive 1970–4, vol. 3, no. 30, p. 19.
10 Bode 1914, p. 11.
11 Thoré-Bürger 1869, p. 164.
12 Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Woman*, ca. 1635/40, The National Gallery, London. Slive 1970–4, no. 131.
13 Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kat.Nr. 858. See, in greater detail on the painting, Ferrier, Kleinert, and Walters 2024.
14 Waagen 1830, no. 333, p. 210. This attribution was made in 1790 by the painter and gallery inspector Johann Gottlieb Puhlmann, who believed the picture to be one of Frans Hals's best works. Puhlmann 1790, no. 24, pp. 26–7.
15 Waagen quickly made up for this shortcoming in his expertise and some twenty years later, in his seminal survey *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, he wrote about Hals in a highly laudatory and, for his time, nuanced manner. See Waagen 1854.
16 1840: Frans Hals, *Portrait of Jan Miense Molenaer (?)*, 1632–6, Kat.Nr. 800 (here cat. 56); Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Woman*, 1632–5, Kat.Nr. 801 (here cat. 25); 1843: Frans Hals, *Portrait of Johannes Acronius*, ca. 1627, Kat.Nr. 767 (here cat. 14); Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, 1627, Kat.Nr. 766 (here cat. 13); 1869: Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Lady*, ca. 1638–40, Kat.Nr. 801J, stolen in 1972.
17 See Stehr 2011, p. 73; Stockhausen 2000, p. 109.
18 See Stockhausen 2000, p. 109, no. 278, p. 272, no. 279, p. 273.
19 Ibid., p. 109.
20 Fouquet-Plümacher and Kawaletz 1996.
21 Stockhausen 2000, pp. 109–10.
22 Ibid., no. 277, p. 272.
23 Ibid., no. 282, p. 273.
24 Stock 1930, p. 220.
25 Stockhausen 2000, no. 280, p. 273.
26 Slive 1970–4, no. 132; Grimm 1989, no. 104.
27 The painting appears to have been placed in the collection's depot immediately after its acquisition. See Bode 1871a, p. 17.
28 See, on this point, Valentiner 1921, pp. 166, 317; Slive 1970–4, no. 132.
29 Gemäldeakte, Dokumentation der Verluste (documentation of losses), Gemäldegalerie, SMB.
30 See Aachen 2018.
31 See ibid., pp. 335–7, nos. 161–5, 167.
32 Jowell 2018, p. 64. On the special relationship between Suermondt and Thoré-Bürger, see the detailed account in Jowell 2018.
33 Brink 2018, p. 26.
34 On the purchase of the Suermondt Collection, see the detailed account in Lepper 1988–9.
35 Stockhausen 2000, p. 273, no. 281.
36 Meyer and Bode 1878, p. 158, Kat.Nr. 801D.
37 Frans Hals, *Portrait of an Elderly Man*, 1655–60, Gemäldegalerie, SMB, formerly Kat.Nr. 801E.
38 Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with Cows and Duck Hunters*, 1635/8, Gemäldegalerie, SMB, Kat.Nr. 2019. On the exchange, see Dokumentation der abgegebenen Werke (documentation of works surrendered), Gemäldegalerie, SMB.
39 Dokumentation der abgegebenen Werke (documentation of the works surrendered), Gemäldegalerie, SMB.
40 Slive 1970–4, no. 202.
41 Chronik 1929.
42 Michaelis 1995, p. 36.
43 Wood, 65×78.7 cm, formerly Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Kat.Nr.1691; Michaelis 1995, p. 19.
44 Bode 1912.
45 Manteuffel 1920–1; Poensgen 1926, p. 90.
46 Slive 2014, pp. 31, 71; Tummers 2013, p. 16.
47 Gemäldeakte, Dokumentation der Gemäldegalerie, SMB.
48 Slive 1970–4, no. 47.