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EST. 1817

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Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck (Haarlem
between 1600 and 1603–1662)

*Portrait of Johan de Waal (1594–1678),
Seated Half-length Wearing Black and Holding a Hat*

Signed, inscribed with the age of the sitter, and
dated “Aetatis 59. 1653/Johan vSpronck”

Oil on panel

35 x 27 1/8 in. (88.9 x 69 cm.)



Provenance

Sale; Van der Schley D. du Bre, Amsterdam 22 December 1817, lot 107.

Sale; Amsterdam 14 May 1832, lot 89 (to Anderson).

Van den Benden, Brussels; sold, Drouot, Paris, 9 February 1928, lot 103.

Comtesse de la Beraudiere, her sale, New York, 11–13 December 1930, lot 169 (as a self-portrait).

Joseph J. Bodell, Providence, RI, USA.

Literature

R.E.O. Ekkart, , *Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck: Leven en werken van een Haarlems portretschilder uit de 17-de eeuw*, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, 1979, 54 & 118, no. 91, illustrated on p. 196.

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Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck depicts this fifty-nine-year-old sitter directly and honestly in the artist's perfected mature style. This easily recognised 'Haarlem portrait' owes a large debt to Frans Hals (1582/3–1666); after Hals, Verspronck was the most important portrait painter in Haarlem, receiving numerous prestigious commissions. Here he depicts the sitter's somewhat wistful and wise face in a glowing halo created with thin wisps of paint over a light ground. The importance of the sitter and of this commission is evident in the inclusion of the akimbo arm and reverse-palm hand positioned in a bravura display of painting to extremely convincing effect. The artist laboured over the position of the chair making at least one major change to the composition. The *pentiment* reveals the improvement of the illusion, positioning the sitter rigidly upright, off-centre and slightly off-balance as if in the moment of landing on the chair's surface or about to rise. The casualness of the positioning of the arms and the hat 'at the ready' effectively communicates that this important man has paused in mid-motion to have a master paint his portrait.

In 1653 the year of this painting, the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) was embarking on the most ambitious and dangerous commercial, colonial projects in the company's, and the Dutch Republic's, history, including the establishment of a trading post in southernmost Africa.

This self-assured sitter is Johan de Waal, twice Burgemeester of Haarlem (in 1627 and 1633), Kolonel and prominent, along with many other male relatives, officer of the St Jorisdoelen Guild (see fig. 1), and one of the scions of the De Waal family. The family played a major role in the domestic politics of the Dutch Republic and a critical role in the formation and success of the Republic's commercial ventures in South Africa.

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Fig. 1: Pieter de Grebber, *Maaltijd van officieren van de St Jorisoelen*, 1624, Johan de Waal appears in this St Jorisoelen Guild portrait: fourth from the left, standing.

In J.C. de Waal and H.D. van Louw's thorough genealogical account, *DIE DE WAAL FAMILIE SE GESKIEDENIS OOR 350 JAAR IN SUID-AFRIKA*,¹ explores the importance of the family and especially the eponymous grandson of the present sitter, Johannes (Jan) de Waal, who travelled to the colony on the ship *Tournai* and became the Quartermaster and Sexton of Cape Church, a political leader of the colony and an extremely wealthy man. The name De Waal appears on public parks and buildings, numerous streets and multiple businesses, including a winery ranking among the top ten in South Africa. The history of the South African nation and the fate of this Dutch family of adventurers, politicians and businessmen are intimately interwoven over the next 350 years, from the moment of the exploratory mission to the Cape in the same year as Verspronck's sensitive portrait.

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Like the celebrated portrait of Michiel de Waal emptying his *roemer* by Hals (fig. 2), Verspronck portrays De Waal with similar irreverence, with his jaunty hand and balanced hat. The artist employs a comparable illusion and bravura technique in his equally successful *Portrait of Eduard Wallis* (fig. 3). De Waal may have been aware of the Wallis portraits of a decade earlier and asked for a similar reverse palm in his portrait, or perhaps the artist remembered the particular effect achieved and re-employed the device.



Fig. 2: Frans Hals, *The Banquet of the Officers of the St George Militia Company* (detail), 1627, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.



Fig. 3: Johan Verspronck, *Portrait of Eduard Wallis*, 1652, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This portrait of the Bergemeester and the pendant depicting his wife (1597–1678) (fig. 4), whom he married in 1620 (see Ekkart, no. 92, under Literature above), demonstrate the level of commissions that Verspronck was executing at this time. With the De Waal family's ongoing involvement with the guilds (most notably the St Jorisdoolen), ensuring a family album by some

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of the greatest artists of the day (most remarkably, Michiel de Waal by Hals, but also including Pieter de Grebber (c.1600–1652/3) and others), Johan de Waal here continues the tradition of bold family portraiture, after his appearance, some twenty years previously, in the St Jorisdoolen Guild portrait by De Grebber (fig. 1). As the captain of the company he is wearing a sash and is standing gesturing elegantly, revealing not only the casual, confident ease of the sitter, but also the masterful brushwork of the next generation of Haarlem artists.



Fig. 4: Johan Verspronck, *Portrait of Aeltje Dircksdr. Pater (1597–1678)*, 1653, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

1. J.C. de Waal and H.D. van Louw, *DIE NAGESLAG VAN JOHANNES (JAN) DE WAAL 1692–1768 DIE DE WAAL FAMILIE SE GESKIEDENIS OOR 350 JAAR IN SUID-AFRIKA*.