

# ALFRED BADER COLLECTS

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Celebrating Fifty Years of  
The Bader Collection

AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE



Figure 5: Luca Giordano, *Jacob's Dream*, around 1694–1700, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1988 (31-003). Photographer unknown.

The golden anniversary of The Bader Collection at Queen's University in 2017 marks a special moment in the history of Canadian museums. Not only is The Bader Collection the strongest holding of Old Masters in any Canadian university art gallery, but it is also the most comprehensive collection of paintings by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) and his circle in any Canadian institution. It contains one of the nation's two paintings by the highly accomplished Greek artist El Greco (around 1541–1614) in public collections; one of two paintings by the idiosyncratic Italian master Giovanni di Niccolò de Lutero, called Dosso Dossi (around 1486–1542); and one of three paintings by the classicizing French artist Sébastien Bourdon (1616–1671). Comprised of more than five hundred paintings, sculptures and works on paper that span the fourteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries, the collection contributes fundamentally to the study and enjoyment of early modern European art in Canada. This superb group of works, which has served such a key role in the development of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre and its community over the last fifty years, is the result of the highly selective eye of one Queen's alumnus, Alfred Bader.

**B**EGINNING WITH HIS FIRST GIFT of a *Salvator Mundi* (Fig. 1) by Girolamo Galizzi (around 1485–after 1556) in 1967, Dr Bader has demonstrated a clear vision for a collection of historical European paintings for the Agnes. This work attests to his love of Biblical subjects and images of the human face: the subject’s indirect gaze and slightly tilted head convey a subtle despair that foretell Christ’s sacrificial death. Less concerned with still life and landscape, Dr Bader has long preferred historical narratives and portraits, genres that offer the viewer “a better understanding of man.”<sup>1</sup> The painting also shows his discerning appreciation for quality in terms of the convincing rendering of volume, the subtle effects of light and shade, and a harmonious colour palette. It is executed with broad strokes and thoughtful details, such as the highlights on the transparent orb and the crisp folds of the mantle. Though the collection’s focus has shifted from Italian to Northern paintings since this founding gift, the principles of figural subject matter and technical excellence continue to shape Drs Alfred and Isabel Bader’s contributions.

In recent decades, The Bader Collection has focused on Rembrandt and his students because of their exceptional technique, dramatic characters, and imaginative compositions. Though Rembrandt’s *Head of an Old Man in a Cap* (Fig. 2) was attributed to a student of Rembrandt in 1979, Dr Bader noted the early monogram at the upper right corner, the engraving after it by Jan Gillisz. van Vliet (1605–1668) in which Rembrandt is mentioned as its creator and the free handling of paint as convincing

evidence of the master’s authorship. The Rembrandt Research Project revised its opinion and published the painting as by Rembrandt’s hand in 2005, two years after it came to Queen’s. This attribution proves Dr Bader’s superior connoisseurial eye, but the image’s tremendous visual impact requires no authentication: the deftly applied strokes of paint that communicate the skin’s topography, the subtle evocation of contours along the shadowed half of his face and the solemn expression combine to create a moving account of aged piety. When it hung in the Bader home in Milwaukee, this *tronie* (character study) was paired with one of Dr Bader’s “favorite works,” a painting by Rembrandt’s close associate in Leiden, Jan Lievensz. (1607–1674). *Profile Head of an Old Woman (“Rembrandt’s Mother”)* (Fig. 3), which came to the Agnes in 2005, immediately captured Dr Bader’s attention when it was auctioned in 1988. He wrote of its appeal that the “marvelous, delicate transparency of the headscarf,” which contrasts with the plain and wrinkled face of the elderly woman, serves as “a symbol for her inner goodness.”<sup>2</sup> Viewed together, these evocative heads not only represent alternative approaches to suggesting spirituality, but they also exemplify the early achievements of these competing friends. Lievensz., whose work is well-represented in The Bader Collection, clearly holds his own with Rembrandt as a master of invention and painterly artifice.

Dr Bader’s fascination with the larger field of Dutch and Flemish painting stems partially from the rich texture of the human experience that these artists capture.



Figure 1: Girolamo Galizzi (called Girolamo da Santacroce), *Salvator Mundi*, 1520s, oil on canvas. Gift of Dr and Mrs Alfred Bader, 1967 (10–011). Photograph by Bernard Clark.

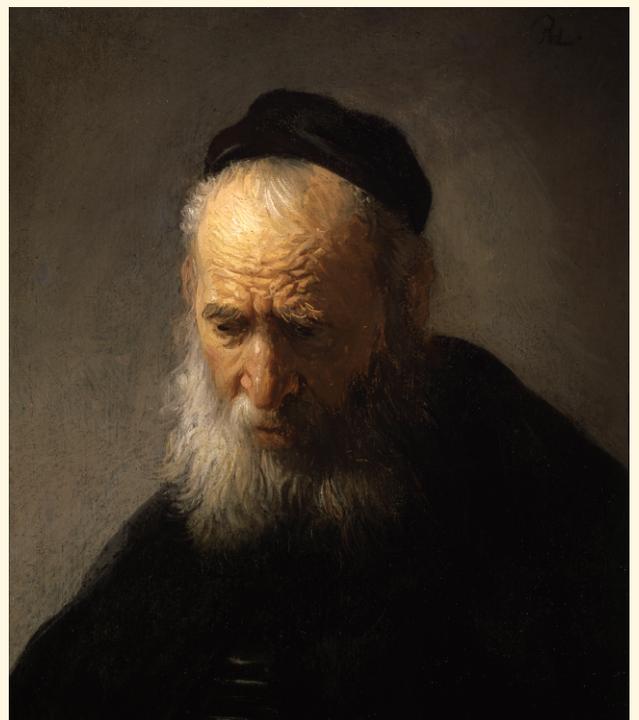


Figure 2: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Head of an Old Man in a Cap*, around 1630, oil on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2003 (46–031). Photograph by John Glembin.



Figure 3: Jan Lievensz., *Profile Head of an Old Woman ("Rembrandt's Mother")*, around 1630, oil on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2005 (48-001). Photographer unknown.

*Joseph Selling Grain in Egypt* (Fig. 4) by Claes Cornelisz. Moeyaert (1591–1655), presented to the Agnes in 1980, deserves special attention in this respect, for Dr Bader's appreciation of it encompasses not only its theatrical composition and impressive scale but also the psychological complexity with which the protagonist is imbued. Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers but nonetheless able to rise through the ranks of the pharaoh's counsellors (Genesis 41: 1–46), presides over the distribution of stored grain during seven years of drought. At the depths of the population's hunger, Joseph consents to accepting the Egyptians' most prized possessions in exchange for food, which Moeyaert conveys through the woman in the foreground bemoaning the threat of losing her jewels and the woman on the steps above proffering her child. Dr Bader has astutely observed that Moeyaert depicts Joseph not as a hero but as a "manipulator" who "played cat and mouse with people," in contrast to his later deliverance of the Egyptian people for which he is usually celebrated.<sup>3</sup> Dr Bader was plainly moved by the creative manner in which Moeyaert interprets the Bible and the artist's sensitivity to the intricacies of human character.



Figure 4: Claes Cornelisz. Moeyaert, *Joseph Selling Grain in Egypt*, 1650, oil on canvas. Gift of Dr and Mrs Alfred Bader, 1980 (23-038). Photographer unknown.

Similarly, Dr Bader admits a very personal response to certain themes, such as Jacob's Dream, a common subject in both Northern and Southern Europe in the seventeenth century. Its representation (Fig. 5) by Luca Giordano (1634–1705) minimizes the traditional wild landscape and concentrates on the heavenly stairway that angels ascend and descend, symbolizing the divine covenant with the Israelites. When it arrived at the Agnes in 1988, it was the first depiction of the subject to enter the collection. Writing in 1975 about Giordano's painting, Dr Bader remarked achingly: "It is surely no accident that the very first well known dream in the Bible is not that of a king or of a general but of a man at the lowest point in his life—homeless and hunted, yearning for God's promise that He would return him to his country."<sup>4</sup> He confessed in later years that he had thought of the theme often while prisoner in a war camp near Montreal.<sup>5</sup> This simple but powerful statement demonstrates the sustaining effect of art for the soul.

One of the most recent additions to the Queen's University collection, *Architectural Capriccio with a Self-Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman* (Fig. 6) by the view painter Bernardo Bellotto (1721–1780), echoes the Italian origins of the initial Bader donation while offering a prime example of a painting destined for the university environment. Though this imaginary scene differs greatly from much of the collection in its dimensions and classical motifs, it fulfills Dr Bader's vision of a representative group of Baroque artworks. When he offered to donate the painting in 2016, Dr Bader praised it as a "magnificent Bellotto" that would be "one of the finest in Canada."<sup>6</sup> The combination of the self-portrait in noble robes framed by the stately architecture that recalls two glorious sites in Italy—the Arch of Constantine (315 CE) in Rome and Jacopo Sansovino's Libreria Vecchia in Venice (1537–1560)—reveals how the painter knowledgeably drew upon the past to insert himself into the European visual tradition. Surely the artist's intention was not lost on Dr Bader, for The Bader Collection contains several paintings that seek to reinforce the artist's elevated status. Furthermore, the reference to the *Ars Poetica* by Horace (65–8 BCE) on the bill posted on the monumental column makes explicit comparison between poets and painters, invoking a larger dialogue around the humanities that is appropriate for a university collection.

There was no art centre on campus when Dr Bader attended Queen's, so he drew inspiration from his experiences at Harvard University, where he received his doctorate in chemistry in 1950, and at Oberlin College, where his friend Wolfgang Stechow had transformed the collection in the 1940s and 1950s. In both of these models, Dr Bader appreciated the excellence of the art history and art conservation programs, as well as of the art galleries. A mere fifteen years after his first gift, Dr Bader observed

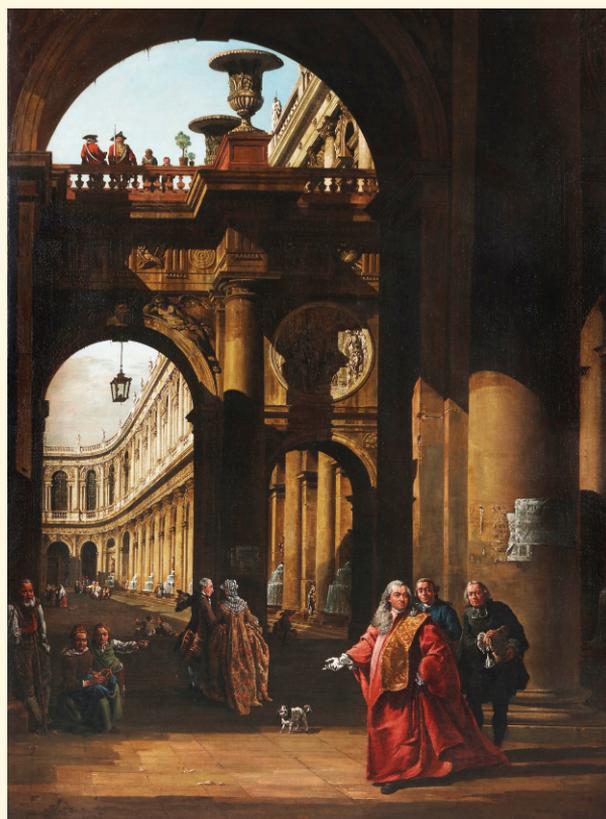


Figure 6: Bernardo Bellotto, *Architectural Capriccio with a Self-Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman*, around 1762–65, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2016 (59-006). Photograph by Bernard Clark.

that the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, and The Bader Collection within it, had helped the larger university become "more balanced."<sup>7</sup> Classes from English to Music to Occupational Therapy employ the collection to shape students into more perceptive viewers and more inspired thinkers. Yet, when confronted with gratitude commensurate with his generosity, Dr Bader's modesty has prevailed: "Think of me as a Queen's man who wants to do his very best to bring a fine collection of Old Master paintings to the school he loves best."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, there could be no greater expression of his passion for paintings and his devotion to Queen's University.

Jacquelyn N. Coutré,  
Bader Curator and Researcher of European Art

1 *Aldrichimica Acta* 6, no. 2 (1973): 2.

2 *Aldrichimica Acta* 25, no. 1 (1992): 1.

3 Agnes Etherington Art Centre and Queen's Television, "The Bader Gift," video, 1982.

4 *Aldrichimica Acta* 8, no. 4 (1975): 37.

5 Alfred Bader, *Chemistry & Art. Further Adventures of a Chemist Collector* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008), 87.

6 Alfred Bader, correspondence with the author, 9 September 2015.

7 Alfred Bader, letter to Vice-Principal James Bennett, 13 January 1983, Agnes Etherington Art Centre donor file.

8 Alfred Bader, letter to Professor Joseph Polzer, 25 March 1975, Agnes Etherington Art Centre donor file.

Cover: Dr Alfred Bader with Principal David Smith in the exhibition *Pictures from the Age of Rembrandt* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in 1984. Photograph courtesy of *Queen's Gazette*.

Back cover (from top):

Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Man with Arms Akimbo* (detail), 1658, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2015 (58-008)

Domenico Theotokopuli (called El Greco), *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail), around 1567 (with later retouchings by the artist), oil and tempera on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1991 (34-011)

Ciro Ferri, *Joseph Turning Away from Potiphar's Wife* (detail), around 1675, oil on canvas. Gift of Dr and Mrs Alfred Bader, 1973 (16-031)

Sébastien Bourdon, *Moses Striking Water from the Rock* (detail), around 1636/37, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1985 (28-203)

Attributed to Joseph Wright of Derby, *A View of Gibraltar during the Destruction of the Spanish Floating Batteries, on the 13th of September, 1782* (detail), 1785, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2001 (44-014)

All photography by Bernard Clark.



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## The BADER COLLECTION



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