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); 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.
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Beginning with his first gift of a Salvator Mundi (Fig. 1) by Gianlorenzo Bagnardi (around 1487–after 1536) in 1967, Dr Bader has demonstrated a clear vision for a collection of historical European paintings for the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. This art testifies to his love of Biblical subjects and images of the human face: the subject’s indirect glance and slightly tilted head convey a subtle despair that too often results in a tragic futility. 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.” 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 is Italian, it reaches from Antiquity to Northern Renaissance, with a growing emphasis on the Flemish tradition. The works of Giorgione, Titian, and Veronese are well represented, as are paintings from Tintoretto, El Greco, and the Old Masters. The Bader Collection 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.” Indeed, there could be no greater expression of his passion for paintings and his devotion to Queen’s University.

In recent decades, the Bader Collection has focused on Rembrandt and his students because of their exceptional creator and the free handling of paint as convincing (1606–1669) in which Rembrandt is mentioned as its originator and painterly artifice. His headscarf, “which contrasts with the plain and wrinkled face of the elderly woman, serves as ‘a symbol for her inner goodness.’” Viewed together, these evocative paintings that seek to reinforce the artist’s elevated status, demonstrate the sustaining effect of art for the soul.

Joseph Segeling in Egypt (Fig. 4) by Claus Cornellis. Moyselet (1951–1955), presented to the Agnes in 1988, deserves special attention in this respect, for Dr Bader’s appreciation of its enigmatic and poetic character, which inspired him to donate the painting in 2016. Dr Bader praised it as a “magnificent Bellotto” that would be “one of the finest in Canada.” The combination of the self-portrait in noble attire and the Venetian landscape, is repeated with great effect in the portrait of the Agnes depicted in 1982. It surprised Dr Bader that an Old Master painting, Dr Bader remarked achingly: “It is surely no accident that the very first well known dream that was dreamt about the Agnes in 1980, is the one that Dr Bader had in the same year: ‘It is the painterly artifice that is appropriate for a university collection.”

Similarly, Dr Bader admires a very personal response to certain themes, such as Jacob’s Dream, a common subject in Rembrandt and his students, especially in the seventeenth century. Its representation (Fig. 5) by Luca Giordano (1634–1705) minimizes the traditional visual elements of the biblical narrative and conjures a way that angels ascend and descend, symbolizing the divine through the heavenly staircases that are a common theme throughout the Agnes in 1988, it was the first depiction of the subject in this manner. The Giordano’s painting, Dr Bader remarked admiringly: “It is certainly true that the very first well known dream that was dreamt about the Agnes in 1980, is the one that Dr Bader had in the same year: ‘It is the painterly artifice that is appropriate for a university collection.”

One of the most recent additions to the Queen’s University Architectural Capriccio with a Self-Portrait (Fig. 6) by the Venetian landscape artist Giambattista Bellotto (1721–1780), echoes the Italian origin of the initial Bader donation while offering a prime example of a painting devoted for the university environment. Though this imaginary scene differs greatly from much of the collection in its baroque 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.”

The collection of Old Masters at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre and the Bader Curator Researcher of European Art

Jacquelyn N. Couturier, Bader Curator Researcher of European Art

1. Albrecht Dürer, A Treatise on the Proportions of the Human Figure (1528), in Laszlo Kovesi, ed., Man and the Human Figure in the Western Tradition (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 37.
4. Photograph by John Glembin.
6. Alfred Bader, correspondence with the author, 9 September 2015.
Evidence of the master’s authorship. Rembrandt Research Project revised its opinion and published the painting’s attribution to Lievensz. in 2003. 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 icon (character study) was paired with one of Dr Bader’s “favorite works,” a painting by Rembrandt’s close associate, Lievensz. (1607–1674). Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman (Fig. 4) by Claes Cornelisz. of Leiden, Jan Lievensz. (1599–1674). Portrait of an Old Woman (Rembrandt’s Mother) (Fig. 3), which came to the Agnes in 2015, immediately captured Dr Bader’s attention when it was acquired in 1980. He wrote of it as being the “marvelous, delicate transparency of the kled face of the elderly woman, serves as “a symbol for her inner goodness.” 2 Viewed together, these evocative heads not only represent alternative approaches to suggesting spirituality, but they also exemplify the early achievements of those 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 treasure of the human experience that these artists capture. Joseph Selingraven in Egypt (Fig. 4) by Claes Cornelisz. Mysiowiec (1510–1551), presented to the Agnes in 1983, is a testament to the young artist’s fascination with the Near East, a world that held a special fascination for him. The powerful, realistic, and classical motifs, it fulfills Dr Bader’s vision of a representation of a Venetian nobleman. 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 the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman (Fig. 4) by the magnificent Bellotto” that would be “one of the finest in Canada.” 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 (1567–1565)—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 work to reinforce the artist’s elevated status. Furthermore, the reference to the Dom Pistolet by Horace (68 BCE) on the bill posted on the monumental columns makes explicit competition between poets and painters, involving a larger dialogue around the humanism that is appropriate for a university collection.

There was no art on campus when Dr Bader attended Queen’s, so he drew inspiration from his experiences at Stanford University, where he earned his doctorate in chemistry in 1955, and Oberlin College, where his friend Wolfgang Stechow had transformed the collection in 1949. In both of these models, Dr Bader recognized the importance of integrating art and art conservation programs, as well as of the art galleries. A mere fifteen years after his first gift, Dr Bader observed

Similarly, Dr Bader admits a very personal response to certain themes, such as Jacob’s Dream, a common subject of Rembrandt’s in the seventeenth century. In its representation (Fig. 5) by Luca Giordano (1634–1705), mimics the traditional visual language that implies the visionary nature of Jacob’s encounter. In Dr Bader’s interpretation, the painting is a reworking of the Dream of Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers but nonetheless able to live through the ranks of the pharaoh’s counsellors (Genesis 41: 1–41), provides the distillation of stolen grain during seven years of drought. At the depths of the population’s hunger, Joseph conveys to Egypt’s most prized poisonous in exchange for food, which Mozaart conveys through the woman in the foreground conveying the threat of losing her jewels and the woman on the steps above proffering her child. Dr Bader has certainly observed that Mozaart depicts Joseph not as a hero but as a “manipulator” who “played cat and mouse with people.” In contrast to this later deliverance of the Egyptian people for which he is usually celebrated, Dr Bader was plainly moved by the creative manner in which Mozaart interprets the Bible and the artist’s sensitivity to the intricacies of human character.

In 1958, Dr Bader purchased a Document: At the beginning of the second decade of the Queen’s University Architectural Capriccio with a Self-Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman (Fig. 3) by the magnificent Bellotto” that would be “one of the finest in Canada.” 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 (1567–1565)—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 work to reinforce the artist’s elevated status. Furthermore, the reference to the Dom Pistolet by Horace (68 BCE) on the bill posted on the monumental columns makes explicit competition between poets and painters, involving a larger dialogue around the humanism that is appropriate for a university collection.

There was no art on campus when Dr Bader attended Queen’s, so he drew inspiration from his experiences at Stanford University, where he earned his doctorate in chemistry in 1955, and Oberlin College, where his friend Wolfgang Stechow had transformed the collection in the 1940s and 1950s. In both of these models, Dr Bader recognized the importance of integrating art and art conservation programs, as well as of the art galleries. A mere fifteen years after his first gift, Dr Bader observed
Beginning with his first gift of a Salvator Mundi (Fig. 1) by Girolamo Galliè (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 that is appropriate for a university collection. 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 Jacques Sansemois’s L’Evetia Vocea in Venice (1577–1582)—echoes the way the painting paradoxically draws 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 reinstate the artist’s elevated status.

Throughout, the reference to the Jan Fonteyn by Horace (65 BCE–62 CE) on the bill posted on the monumental column makes explicit comparison between poets and painters, invoking a larger dialogue around the humanist tradition that is appropriate for a university collection.

There was no art work on campus where Dr Bader attended Queen’s, so he drew inspiration from his experiences at Harvard University, where he earned his doctorate in chemistry in 1953, and at Oberlin College, where he enrolled in Occupational Therapy to shape a more balanced “change from English to a life of service to the community” with a fine collection of Old Master paintings to the school he loves best. Indeed, there could be no greater place to find the reference for paintings and his devotion to Queen’s University. However, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the major focus of Dr Bader’s collecting was the rembrandt.

In recent decades, The Bader Collection has focused on Rembrandt, and his students because of their exceptional technical manner, dramatic style, and imaginative composition. Though Rembrandt’s Head of an Old Man in a Cap (Fig. 2) was attributed to a student of Rembrandt in 1979, Rembrandt and his students because of their exceptional technical manner, dramatic style, and imaginative composition.

The Rembrandt Research Project revised its opinion and published the portrait of a woman with a headscarf, “Agnes Mundi” (Fig. 3), which came to the Agnes in 2003, immediately captures Dr Bader’s attention when it was acquired in 1988. He wrote of it: “This is the most marvelous, delicate transparency of the headscarf,” which contrasts with the plain and wrinkled faces of the elderly woman, and “speaks for her inner goodness.”

View painter Bernardo Bellotto (1721–1780), echoes the Italian origin of the initial Dr 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 degree of historical and classical motifs, it fulfills Dr Bader’s vision of a representative group of Baroque artworks. When he offered to donate the painting in 2003, Dr Bader praised it as “a magnificent Bellotto” that would be “one of the finest in Canada.”

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Figure 1: Girolamo Galizzi (called Girolamo da Santacroce), Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman, around 1762–65, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2016 (59-006). Photographer unknown.

Figure 2: Rembrandt van Rijn, Head of an Old Man in a Cap, around 1630, oil on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2016 (59-001). Photograph by John Glembin.

Figure 3: Rembrandt van Rijn, Portrait of an Old Woman (“Rembrandt’s Mother”) 1630, oil on canvas. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2016 (59-002). Photograph by John Glembin.
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