

KLAAS MULLER

A D R I A E N T H O M A S Z K E Y

Portrait of a bearded man, holding his gloves

Adriaenz Thomasz Key was born in Breda (1544) as the son of Jan Thomas Mertens en Margriete Adriaen Keijen. After the death of his uncle Willem Key (in 1568) Adriaen Thomasz took over his studio in Antwerp and the name of his deceased uncle by adding it's surname to his own name. So Adriaen Thomasz Key was born for commercial reasons.

Although Adriaen Thomasz was a calvinist, he stayed in Antwerp for the rest of his remaining career. Like his uncle, he painted several mythological and religious scenes but he was mainly renowned for his portraits. Amongst his clientele were the political and religious leaders of his era, such as Willem of Orange, Margareta of Parma, Abraham Ortelius and others.

Keys portraits can be set in turbulent times in history, the brink of the *80 Years war*, in which the religious, political and social structures were shook and up for discussion. Due to professional reasons, he was in contact with both sides of the disputed and their protagonists, his portraits are silent witnesses of a deep earnestness and a self awareness that characterizes the Dutch Renaissance.

Therefore this portrait is fitting the Zeitgeist: This man, looks (down) at us, confident and with a stern look. The background has little life in it and doesn't take away the force of the face in the front. He is holding on tight to his glove(s), the latter a symbol of both protection as violence. Two visible rings might be the indication of a female pendant.

As Mr Gijs Key pointed out, the painter made a portrait from the same man twice: the other version is catalogued in Dr. Jonckheeres biography of Key under A91. (K. Jonckheere, *Adriaen Thomasz. Key, Portrait of a Calvinist painter*, Brepols Publishers, 2007, p. 116). After the restoration of that work the date 1574 and the age of the man (48) appeared.

We are grateful to Dr. K. Jonckheere for confirming our work as an authentic A. T. Key, datable in the '70 of the 16th century. We are also grateful to Gijs Key for helping us with our research.

Oil on panel, 80 x 59 cm

