HEAD STUDIES BY BALTHASAR DENNER

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XII. ILLUSTRATIONS
FOREWORD

Our reconstruction of the history of art in the early eighteenth century tends to throw spotlights on such major epicenters as Paris and Venice. Except for the spectacular architectural projects of South Germany and the patronage of King Frederick of Prussia, artistic activity in the German states is comparatively little studied. Many an artist of lesser caliber than Balthasar Denner has received thorough monographic treatment merely because of his geographic or stylistic proximity to a major cultural center of his epoch.

In 1914 an ambitious exhibition in Darmstadt brought together more than a thousand works of German art from the period 1700-1850. While this event ought to have provided a point of departure for any number of investigations, it did not. Perhaps the timing was at fault. To judge from the paucity of current literature on this period, as well as the thick layers of dust that lay on so many of the volumes I used in my research, the subject of German art in the early eighteenth century has failed to capture much recent interest.

It can be said that Denner has been neglected at least partially because of when and where he lived. Paradoxically, those are the very factors which have been of paramount concern
to the few writers who have discussed his work in modern times. They either have been interested in the identity of Denner's sitters, evaluated his role in the cultural history of Hamburg, or seen him as a manifestation of the Zeitgeist. In 1969, a modest exhibition of Denner's works was held in the lobby of the B.A.T. Haus, a tobacco factory in Hamburg. Accompanying this humble exhibition of works borrowed from the nearby Hamburger Kunsthalle was a carefully researched scholarly catalogue by Dr. Gerhard Gerkins. But the circumstances of this exhibition are not insignificant. This was the second in a series of shows dealing with local artists, and Denner's works were shown in tandem with those of Franz Werner Tamm, another Hamburg painter whose art bears little relation to Denner's. It was local interest in the cultural heritage of Hamburg rather than art historical curiosity which prompted this exhibition. Denner's work has yet to be studied for its own artistic merit. The paintings of old men and women have often been mentioned, but never seriously investigated.

For moral support, and for awarding me the funds to do research in Europe, I thank the Art Department of Oberlin College. Although Professor Ellen H. Johnson had little to do with this thesis, she had everything to do with my being here to write it, for which I am warmly grateful. Professor Wolfgang Stechow pointed me in the right direction early in my research.
The memory of his wisdom and wit, his kindness and patience with aspiring "beginners" like myself, will always be with me. Lastly, I wish to thank my advisor, Professor Richard Spear, for the time, indispensible criticism and encouragement he offered throughout all stages of my research.
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CHAPTER I

DENNER'S BIOGRAPHY AND CAREER AS A FORMAL PORTRAITIST

The scars of the Thirty Years War had only begun to heal when Balthasar Denner was born in 1685. The war started in 1618 to determine whether the German States would be dominated by Catholic interests or by Protestant. Entwined, however, with the religious alliances were a myriad of political and feudal quarrels in which external European powers were quick to meddle. Eventually, the affairs of the soul and conscience of Germany were left to foreign mercenary troops to settle. By 1634, all semblance of unity in both the Protestant Union and the Catholic League had vanished; Germany became a battleground onto which descended armies from France, Austria, Sweden and Spain. To feed the soldiers, the Germans were left to starve. The loss of life from the combined effects of battle and lack of food was staggering. Even more horrible was the exhaustion and deprivation afflicting the survivors.

Peace negotiations in 1648 brought an end to the fighting. The terms were expedient. The negotiators adopted partial solutions and untenable provisions with a potential for disastrous repercussions. For our purposes, the most significant effect of the Treaty of Westphalia was the weakening of
imperial power. The Holy Roman Empire became little more than a name. This assured that the hundreds of princely states, independent and imperial towns, were free to pursue their separate interests and practice local political absolutism. The sovereignty permitted by this provision went so far as to grant the provincial seats the right to negotiate foreign treaties. The terms of the peace upheld the principle, *cujus regio ejus religio*. This evolved in practice to mean *cujus regio ejus cultus*, for given this political diffusion, the development of a distinctive national culture in Germany was unthinkable.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the war and its aftereffects to some extent diverted attention and funds away from artistic activity. There were, however, dubious forms of patronage carried on even in the thick of the struggle. Maximilian, Elector of Bavaria, was not above using his leadership of the Catholic League to his advantage in the extortion of masterpieces from Protestant territories. He once offered to keep his troops out of Protestant Nuremberg if the city would give him Dürer's *Apostle* panels.¹ His coercive tactics were met in kind by the Protestant commander Gustavus Adolphus who emptied Maximilian's *Kunstkammer* during the Swedish occupation of Munich.² Such power plays in which works of art were the stakes occurred often in the course of the war. These, combined with widespread looting and burning of buildings, discouraged most of the lesser junkers from engaging in much patronage. In any case, with princely revenues going to support the armies, few were in a position to afford art.
So destructive and devastating was the war that the recovery was extremely slow. The nobility gradually managed to refill their treasuries by the late years of the seventeenth century, and only then were in a position to resume cultural activities. Their method of raising revenues was to tax agriculture and commerce. Each prince levied a separate tax on goods transported through his lands. Cargoes shipped down the Elbe from south of Dresden to Hamburg could be subject to as many as thirty different tax collectors. While fattening the pockets of the princelings, this taxation had the effect of slowly choking the mercantile towns of the north. The economic troubles of the towns were compounded with the need to support a heavy influx of war refugees. Struggles between towns and princes ensued, and by the early eighteenth century, a mutually beneficial situation had been worked out in most areas, clearing the way for a surge of growth and power for the free cities.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the princes were in a position to satisfy their yearnings for the luxury and refinement of court life enjoyed by their equals in other lands. Catholic and Protestant principalities had increasingly polarized with the war. The southern German territories had mainly become Catholic, and they turned to Italy and France for a massive cultural transfusion. In the North where most of the states were solidly Protestant, there was some flirtation with the fashions of French court life, but the closest ties were formed with England and Holland. Thus one finds Dresden being hailed as the "Florence on the Elbe," while Landgraf Wilhelm VIII of Hesse was judiciously avoiding the
purchase of pictures with Catholic iconography, and forming a
collection rich in works by Hals, Rembrandt and his followers,
Dutch landscapes, still lifes and genre scenes.  

The connections of the free Protestant towns of northern
Germany with Holland and England were of a more fundamental
nature than those of the courts. Their economies were inter­
dependent with those countries; Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen,
the Hansa cities, were mainstays of trade with Holland and
England. Due to its particularly strategic location on the
Elbe, Hamburg became the port which was most important in
bringing the north German plain into contact with Holland.
Besides the daily contacts of her commerce, Hamburg had a deep
and special connection with the Dutch. When large groups of
Dutch Protestants had fled their homelands to escape the
Spanish religious persecutions, they settled heavily in Hamburg.
Records from the seventeenth century place the Dutch population
of Hamburg at about a quarter its total inhabitants.  

Altona, the town very near Hamburg in which Denner was
reared, had an exceptionally large Dutch population. A large
community of Mennonites had come there from Holland, retaining
to a certain extent their language and customs. Balthasar's
father preached, in Dutch, to a Mennonite congregation founded
by a refugee from Holland in the late sixteenth century.  

These historical, economic, and cultural issues have been
stressed because it is important to keep in mind that Denner's
cultural, and consequently artistic, milieu is of a funda­
mentally different nature than the southern German courtly
or Catholic context. It is the art of the latter sectors
which the mention of German *Rokoko* normally tends to bring to
mind: the Gesamtkunstwerk, stucco putti, rocaille decoration, the exuberant visions of the Zimmermann and Asam brothers. These historical circumstances help to explain why such art was basically irrelevant to a painter like Denner living in Hamburg and Altona, and why the influences he absorbed came in good part from the Netherlands.

We are fortunate in the case of Denner to have a relatively reliable and complete account of his life. It was written by Johan van Gool who visited and interviewed the artist while both were in London in the twenties. Before he died, Denner himself sent a letter to van Gool with information about the last two decades of his career. Because Denner's training and whereabouts are significant factors which often figure in his works, and are probably unfamiliar to most readers, I summarize here what biographical information is most germane.

The artist was born in Hamburg on 15 November, 1685. His father, Jacob Denner, was a Mennonite preacher whose sermons and writings were extraordinarily popular, not only with the Mennonite congregation, but also with Hamburg Protestants and even some Catholics. Van Gool reports that Balthasar took a bad fall when he was eight years old, sustaining a permanent disability which made walking difficult. During his convalescence, he passed the time sketching and copying small prints. Jacob's friends noticed the boy's talents and persuaded him to send the child to study art. Balthasar's first teacher was a Dutch painter working in Altona named Amama. He specialized in water colors of flowers and birds. With Amama,
van Gool relates, the boy "learned the rules of art." After two years, Amama informed Jacob that he had nothing more to teach his talented pupil.

In 1698, Balthasar was sent to Danzig to study with another teacher whose name has not been recorded. Here he learned the technique of oil painting by copying the works of great artists. It was in this period that he first began to paint faces from life.

Balthasar was with his family in Altona again in 1701, sixteen years old. Jacob, concerned that despite his promising ability, his son would be unable to earn a secure living from painting, persuaded the boy to go to work for his uncle in Hamburg and learn the merchant's trade. For nearly seven years, Balthasar dutifully worked in Hamburg, establishing at this time connections with Dutch and English merchants whose homes he was to visit on future journeys. All of Balthasar's spare time he spent painting, and finally in 1708, he left to study art at the Academy in Berlin.

Frederick I, the king of Prussia, conceived the ambitious plan to make Berlin a center of modern ideas and taste. A few years after his establishment of a science academy, he founded the first official art academy in Germany. Not surprisingly, it was based on the model of the French Academy. The main subjects taught were drawing from plaster casts, drawing from drawings, anatomy and perspective. The first director, Joseph Werner, had studied art in Rome and had been miniature painter to Louis XIV. Despite its deliberate
orientation to Rome and Paris, however, the Academy developed a distinctively northern accent, particularly Dutch. Since Frederick's court was in the ascendent, and artistic patronage a high priority, it attracted many foreign painters. The competition for commissions at home prompted French artists like Antoine Pesne to come to Berlin. Holland, however, offered no comparable opportunities to her artists, and they were welcomed in large numbers to Berlin. During Denner's stay, the Dutch artist Terwesten, who had worked in Rome and Paris, was head of the Academy. Many of his countrymen were professors. The official style may have been Italianate, but Dutch landscapes and still lifes were in constant demand at the court, as were paintings in the manner of Dou and van Mieris. The Dutchmen and their German pupils obliged with an abundant production of these kinds of works. König Frederick liked to fancy his capitol "a little Rome," but in terms of the arts, it was just as much "a little Holland."

While at the Academy, Denner did manage to assimilate many of the characteristics of the "international" portrait style. In 1709 he made his first portrait for which he received payment. The sitter, Herzog Christian Augustus, was so pleased with his picture that Denner was invited to paint a group portrait of the court—twenty figures assembled around two tables plus the artist's own likeness. Denner's career was thus launched, and at no time in his life was he ever to be at loss for commissions for court portraits.
The year 1712 found Denner back in Hamburg where he married Esther Winter. He also painted König Frederick IV of Denmark and the Fürstin von Schleswig. He made a brief visit to Amsterdam in 1715 and was in Hannover painting for the court in 1718. Here he met a number of English noblemen who encouraged him to visit their native land. In 1721 Denner went with his family to London via Rotterdam. Except for a visit to Hamburg in 1725, he remained in London until 1728. In 1729 Denner was in Holland where he spent seven of the next ten years. During his Dutch sojourns he lived mainly in Amsterdam, but spent some of his time in small towns in other parts of Holland. Throughout the thirties and forties Denner was occupied with a steady stream of portrait commissions. In 1749 while painting for the Mecklenberg court in Rostock, Denner fell ill and died, leaving forty-six unfinished portraits.

The heads of old people account for only a small portion of Denner's oeuvre. His occupation with portraiture was continuous from 1708 until his death, providing him with a steady and substantial income. Although he painted genre, still life, head studies, and even religious subjects periodically throughout his career, this production was auxiliary to his primary commitment to portraiture. Therefore, prior to any analysis of the head studies, it is essential to consider Denner's conventional portraiture and discover its peculiar character. Without such understanding, it would be difficult to grasp the extraordinary degree of deviation the head studies represent.
For portraits of princes and courtiers, Denner generally employs an elaborate formal mode which stresses the aristocratic eminence of the sitter. Townspeople, musicians, legislators, personal acquaintances and the like, are usually represented in simplified and reduced formats in which the impression of the character as an individual was of greater concern than social station. These generalizations are qualified, however. The half-length portraits without hands form a kind of middle ground where the less expensive portrayals of courtiers approach the appearance of the most elaborate bürgerlich portraits. We shall have cause to return to this problem later. A number of group portraits, more or less conforming to Dutch and English models of "conversation pieces," were made by the artist, but are of little immediate concern.

Antecedents for the courtly representations are found in Flemish and French portraiture of the seventeenth century. While Denner's works never approach the pomp and grandeur of those by van Dyck or Largilliere, they do partake more modestly of some of the same pictorial devices for ennobling the sitter. A full- or knee-length portrait by Denner more often than not will include a background partially closed off on the right by a curtain wall, and open on the left to a landscape. The sitter will be dressed in his most sumptuous or impressive garments, as befit his station. In the portrait of Herzog Christian Ludwig II von Mecklenburg (fig. 42), for example, the duke is partially clad in armor—although in his case it was almost certainly never scuffed on the battlefield—with a luxurious velvet mantle and a fine silk shirt.
Yet there is much in Denner's formal portraits which is alien to seventeenth century predecessors. The majesty, the dignified "impressiveness" of the Baroque portrait is notably absent, even in Denner's earliest works. Part of this difference stems from Denner's figure canon, which is in keeping with eighteenth century French taste. Bodies are drawn smaller and more compact, almost doll-like. The physical size of the sitters is less imposing, and somehow the scale of life reflected in these portraits is more precious than impressive. An air of intimacy supplants the aggressive haughtiness of the Baroque portraits. We find that the sitter as interpreted by Denner is more approachable, with the hint of a smile playing at the corners of the lips.

A portrait of 1738 possibly of Maria Catherina van der Burch in Tours (fig. 43), demonstrates Denner's mature style of court portraiture in its most opulent form. The subject stands in an interior next to a window which opens into a small garden with some architecture visible beyond. A diagonal curve formed by a drapery swag offsets the stringent vertical lines of the setting. The column, such a prominent feature in many a Baroque portrait, is included here on the right side. Yet it has become a vestigial accoutrement relegated to the background, almost lost in shadow, its ascent half hidden by the swag. The figure is idealized in accordance with the Rococo French canon. She is short in stature with a tapering cylindrical torso, and very slender in the waist. Her delicacy of form is complemented by the cut of her dress,
cinched at the waist with a bell-shaped skirt. The satiny fabric is dematerialized by the flicker of silvery light on its folds. All the weight and monumentality of the van Dyckian conception of portraiture yields to the airy lightness and grace of the Rococo.

Ideal beauty as conceived by the eighteenth century artist required drastic "improvements" to be made on nature's design. We recognize the hallmarks here. The face is a pudgy oval with a forehead made unnaturally high and wide. Denner draws the eyebrows as simplified arcs of uniform thickness. The integrity of the pure ovoid form of the head is disturbed as little as possible. The features must hug the surface closely. The wide almond eyes protrude to meet the planes of the forehead and cheekbone, and the area beneath the brows is depressed only minimally. The long nose keeps close to the head and the delicate bow-shaped mouth interrupts the surface unobtrusively. Tending toward a double chin, the contour of the jaw is well concealed beneath layers of flesh. By plumping the cheeks, Denner makes the perimeter of the face, from the temple to the cheekbone to the lower jaw, nearer to an unbroken oval. Whatever bone structure might have distinguished the looks of this woman is of little concern to Denner. If his sitters seem to look more than usually alike, it is because these licenses have been taken so liberally with nature in an effort to coax it to conform to the contemporary ideal. Max Friedlander characterized this phenomenon with remarkable astuteness, if not very much tolerance:
The eighteenth century doctrine of 'Beauty' as the goal of all desire, proclaimed as law, especially by the Germans, hampered the observation of the individual, and hence the growth of the portrait. There is only one Beauty, and no two individuals are alike. If much of the description of the Tours portrait had to do with the face, there is a good reason; the likelihood that Denner was responsible for much besides the head on that canvas, as well as many others like it, is small. Van Gool and others report that Balthasar trained his son and daughters as artists, and as they became sufficiently skilled, they assisted more and more in their father's portrait painting. Denner eventually employed them to finish the costumes, backgrounds, architectural settings, and possibly even the hands. By the thirties and forties, Denner's daughter Catharine, reputed to be a skillful miniature painter in her own right, and his son Jacob, a rather indifferent artist, were probably responsible for all but the head in most of the portraits. Balthasar's own interest in painting heads and indifference to the execution of bodies, costumes, etc., is corroborated in his extensive legacy of preliminary drawings for portraits. We find on a typical sheet only a very small but thoroughly worked up head. Sometimes the head is anchored by a few strokes to indicate the bust, but more often the head seems to float on an otherwise empty page (fig. 59, a and b). The forty-six unfinished painted portraits in Schwerin left by Denner at his death make an eerie display of disembodied heads, all the more unsettling because they are so carefully executed in their rose and ivory cosmetic tints and enamel-like finish.
The Tours portrait is an opulent and expensive type, reserved for the wealthiest and highest-ranking nobility. Less important courtiers, and those not willing to spend so much for their likenesses, were portrayed more modestly. The half-length without hands seems to have been most popular, for Denner charged extra for the hands. The portraits of bewigged noblemen in their finery exhibit very little in the way of difference from Denner's portrait of Handel in Birmingham or from several portraits of the artist's children, or from the more elaborate portrayals of prominent citizens of Hamburg. That Denner's half-length portraits of junkers often look very much like the half-length portraits of burghers tends to undermine Hans Konrad Röthel's argument that Denner had created the consummate expression of the Hamburg citizen's "Idealbildnis" in opposition to courtly portraits. True, many of Denner's portraits of nobility tend to be relatively opulent and complex in design, but there are many others which approach the typical portraits of the local citizenry in their simplicity. What is partially a result of the accurate recording of a sitter's costume ought not be construed as a whole new conception of portrait types; the fact is that many of Denner's portraits of his fellow Hamburgers would be indistinguishable from aristocratic portraits if the requisite lace, brass buttons and the longer wig were added. Nonetheless, some of Röthel's theories may find cautious acceptance as they apply to selected portraits of the well-heeled citizenry of Hamburg.

The early eighteenth century saw the burghers of the free town of Hamburg experiencing an awakening pride and consciousness
of their class identity. Before this time, they had sought to emulate courtly fashions, manners and taste, but now they began to deliberately abjure the frivolity and excesses of the German courts. Dress styles changed, becoming simpler. Flowing Louis XIV wigs were replaced by a shorter, simpler style. The Italian opera failed, because as Denner's contemporary Mattheson put it, "Opern sind mehr für Könige und Fürsten als für Kauf- und Handelsleute." The burghers were infatuated with the ways of the Englishman, seeking to model their manners and values upon his example. What seems to have resulted in Hamburg as one can see from reading the influential "Moral Weeklies" and examining the ideas set forth in the other writings and even legislation, was a moral conservatism of a rather unimaginative sort. Perhaps the phrase "Kampf gegen alles Extreme" best expresses the attitude of the Hamburg intelligentsia, especially as it filtered into the day to day life of the town.

How did Denner portray these stolid burghers? Obviously the deluxe format of the Tours portrait would have been incongruous, so Denner used a reduced and simplified composition. The extreme form of this type is the bust in which only negligible attention is given the costume. Not even distant echoes of van Dyckian elegance and grandeur sound in these pictures. Such is a portrait of Bürgermeisters Clemens Samuel Lipstorp (fig. 44) in which the millstone ruff reminds us of the seventeenth century fashion in Holland. There are also waist-length and even knee-length portraits of non-aristocratic
subjects. In the case of the latter, the setting is lacking in swags and pillars, and the model likely to be seated in his study surrounded by books.

The characterization of the heads in these pictures tends to strike a compromise between nature and the ideal. Although the eyebrows and eyes are stylized, the skin always snowy white with a rosy tinge, and the bone structure relatively subordinated to its fleshy covering, there is room for greater individuality of physiognomies. One would not mistake Bürgermeister Lipstorp for Senator Paridom Coldorp.28

Before leaving the problem of Denner's conventional portraits it would be well to consider their relationship to other developments in German portraiture which represented the standards of contemporary taste. The leaders in this field were mainly foreign artists. Antoine Pesne came from France to work primarily for the court in Berlin. Although superficially similar to Denner's most elaborate portraits, Pesne's greater reliance on props and costumes is evident in works such as his own Portrait of Clemens Samuel Lipstorp in Hamburg, Museum für Hamburger Geschichte.29

His settings are much more richly appointed than Denner's, recalling those of his countryman, Largilliere. Where Pesne tends to be much more anecdotal, exploiting the involvement of a sitter with a prop, a hand gesture or movement, Denner's presentation is more straightforward. His figures simply sit or stand with their hands at rest, inactive if not inert. Pesne's sense of design is also more active. His paintings vibrate with fluttering drapery, dynamic and decorative
curvilinear rhythms. Denner is consistently more stalwart and stable in his compositions, opting for nearly geometric ordering, affirming the discreteness of forms.

If Denner could not assimilate the brio of the French style through Pesne, with whom contact would have been likely, he might have understood the translation of that style into a more subdued visual language by the Hungarian, Adam Manyoki (1673-1757). This portraitist trained in Lüneberg and spent about twenty years working in Hamburg. He was active in Berlin at the time Denner was there. Manyoki's model was also Largilliere, but his interpretation lacked the opulence and exuberance of the Frenchman. It is not unlikely that Denner absorbed the principles of the French portrait style through the mediation of Manyoki, whose native simplicity would have been more compatible with Denner's temperament. In Manyoki's Portrait of Franz Rukoczy II, Fürst von Siebenbürgen (fig. 45), the assertive naturalism of the features as they would appear in a Largilliere portrait is brought under the rigidly geometric control of the German ideal of beauty, the background is simplified and the design is static. It is not difficult to see how the dignified, but hardly grandiose, style of Manyoki might have appealed to Denner, and in the latter's portrait of Herzog Christian Ludwig II (fig. 42), the relationship is clear.

It is also likely that paintings by the older artist, Joannes Kupezky, served as models to both Denner and Manyoki. The court in Braunschweig had some examples of Kupezky's portraits which Denner could have seen. The works of this
Prague-born artist represent a kind of formal aristocratic portraiture which is parallel, but seldom tangent to the Rigaud and Largilliere styles. In Kupezky's Portrait of Kaiser Karl VI (fig. 46), the full-length figure of the emperor is displayed without grandiloquence, but with sobriety and dignity. The imperial crown is present on a table to the left, but it is not a focal point in the composition. The allusions to the glory and power of the emperor are underplayed; indeed there was little enough glory and power left to represent in the empire at that point, but Kupezky does not really develop that sorry state of affairs either. The swags and fluttering draperies are kept to a minimum, and the pose is balanced and restrained. Kupezky's portraits were well received by the German nobility, and if they were not a direct influence on Denner, they went far in establishing the type that Denner's patrons would have wanted. We can see, for example, a strong affinity between Denner's portrait of the Herzogin of Schleswig Holstein-Gottorp (fig. 47) and Kupezky's portrait of his daughter Helene (fig. 48).

The free movement of artists and their works in this period, especially of the traveling portraitists, makes it more difficult to establish which were the specific influences which would have affected an artist like Denner who traveled extensively himself. Occasionally Denner made portraits which look very Dutch. In fact a portrait in the Rijksmuseum which had carried the signature of Cornelius Troost and had been accepted as his work was found, during a recent cleaning, to have the signature of Balthasar Denner underneath the name of
Troost. In his article on Denner's activity in Holland Niemeijer suggests that the portraits of Arnold Boonen and his pupil Quinkhard might have had an effect on Denner. (This may well be so, but it is difficult to find the reproductions of these artists' work for me to make any judgment.) Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any secure portraits by Denner from his Dutch sojourns, as Niemeijer points out. Nonetheless, one does find in Denner's works some reflections of Dutch portraiture of the first half of the seventeenth century; the bürgerlich tradition was strong and the simplicity of the Cornelis de Vos type of portrait is not entirely without significance for Denner's portraits of Hamburg citizens.

Denner's portraiture varies widely in both type and quality. In some of the portraits he allows the individuality of the physiognomy to rule the impression. In others, the uniqueness of the sitter's face is rigorously subordinated to an ideal of perfect beauty. Occasionally, Denner's brushwork is free and lively, but it is sometimes dry, meticulous and calculated. While various points of style may differ greatly from one painting to the next, what unifies Denner's portraiture is a consistent underlying attitude. Denner can best be recognized by his unwavering obedience to a sense of decorum which is embedded in his temporal and cultural context, but at the same time, is singularly his own. An unattractive sitter does not make an unattractive portrait. Denner feeds his sitter's sense of self-importance, giving him dignity and an expression of contentment. If sometimes a facial expression seems to us to border on superciliousness, it is a result
of our modern perception, and certainly not due to any social
criticism on the part of the artist. Denner gave his patrons
the image of themselves which they coveted. More than any
peculiar quirks in his style of drawing or painting, what
seems to characterize a portrait as Denner's is the peculiar
air of response the sitter shows at being painted. Denner's
subjects appear highly self-conscious of their poses and
expressions (fig. 47). This is true of most contemporary
portraiture. But Denner's sitters seem stiff, a little
uncomfortable about the situation; they are uneasy amateur
actors compared to Rigaud's or Largilliere's polished, sophis-
tocated and professional performers.
CHAPTER II

THE PAINTINGS OF OLD MEN AND WOMEN

Denner took his family to London in 1721, stopping en route at Rotterdam where they were guests of a well-connected English merchant named Feurly. Balthasar had brought with him a painting of an old woman, the exactitude of whose execution was remarkable (fig. 32). He probably meant it to serve as what the Italians would call a 'dimostrazione,' a demonstration of his virtuosity intended to impress an audience not yet familiar with his abilities. Feurly was eager to acquaint Rotterdam with the talents of his friend. He took Denner to meet prominent artists, picture dealers and connoisseurs, showing them this painting of an old woman. Perhaps there were those who felt indifferent towards this picture, but their reactions were not recorded. In any case Rotterdam seemed anxious to exhaust its supply of superlatives over this painting. Adrean van der Werff, a highly respected artist, was beside himself with admiration, saying he had never seen anything to rival Denner's painting.

Connoisseurs pronounced it marvelous. So smitten was Karel van Mander with this painting that he could only compare it to the Mona Lisa. Offers to purchase the painting were
plentiful, but although the price climbed, Denner refused to sell. He must have reasoned that the Old Woman would be as valuable in London, and that its prospective worth as a kind of advertisement might outstrip any short-term financial gain he could make by selling it in Rotterdam. If he did think along those lines, his experience in London proved him right.

The reaction to the painting in London was even more enthusiastic than in Holland. Van Gool, who was in London at that time remarked, "there was hardly anybody who did not see it." A wonderstruck admirer offered Denner the enormous sum of 500 guineas for the picture. Denner turned down this bid, and several more that were even higher. Finally the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire expressed his interest in buying the Old Woman. Kaiser Karl VI offered the truly staggering sum of 4700 imperial guilders, one of the highest prices ever paid for any painting at that time.

When he got his picture to Vienna, Kaiser Karl was so impressed with his acquisition that he kept it locked up in a specially built cabinet for which he had the only key. In order that it could never be opened outside of his presence, he kept the key on his person at all times. In 1725, he sent a special envoy to Denner to commission a head of an old man to hang as a pendant (fig. 33). For this painting he paid the same price, and it too was locked away in the cabinet.

Today these two paintings purchased by Kaiser Karl are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. We must try to imagine the impact of the Old Woman upon eyes not yet acquainted with the photographic image. Otherwise the reasons for the
great excitement among the first viewers will be lost to us. The Old Woman in Vienna is a kind of touchstone for the series of old men and woman painted by Denner, both because of the plentiful documentation, and because many of his contemporaries agreed that Denner never surpassed his achievement in this painting. It is the picture which establishes the type which was nicknamed 'Porendenner' by the trade, and to which all the other works of this kind must ultimately be compared. A close analysis of the Vienna Old Woman is therefore essential.

The canvas is small, suitable for a cabinet picture, although not in the sense that Karl's arrangement implies. Shown lifesize, the subject is turned three-quarters to the right, the bust truncated about six inches below the shoulders. Denner modulates the colors in the satin headscarf from gold to an iridescent lavender in the shadows. The amazing subtlety with which the hue and value changes are accomplished attests to the sensitivity and technical expertise of this artist. A softer focus prevails in the rendering of the spotted fur bordering the rust-brown mantle. The woman is situated very close to the picture plane, occupying most of the area of the canvas. A brownish green plane serves as the background.

It is the face which is a miraculous feat of painting. The woman is very old and her skin toughened by years of exposure to the weather. Where the tissues beside the eye have collapsed, a crackle pattern of radiating furrows is formed. Flecks of pink and yellow paint pick out the tiny bulges of the interstices between these lines, giving the
flesh an almost iridescent appearance. A deep crease has formed beneath her brows, casting her eyelids into shadow. Her lips are thin and compressed. The habitual tension of their set has made its mark in the many lines which lead to folds in the side of the chin and above the upper lip.

Denner masterfully reveals the form of the skull through careful modulation of light. He reenforces this by his sensitive observation of surface texture in its relationship to underlying bone structure. Notice, for example, how the protrusion of the cheekbone keeps the covering flesh firm by its supportive pressure. In the hollow below it, the skin is slack, shriveled into an intricate network of tiny wrinkles. Across the forehead, the relatively thin skin is stretched taut in contrast to the bridge of the nose which is puckered and bunched into folds. A few hairs escape from the headcloth on the sides, and the roots of the hairs on her forehead are visible. They are wispy lines of white and grey, drawn separately, laboriously, hair by hair.

The gaze of the woman is directed forward toward the onlooker, but it cannot be said that her eyes meet those of the spectator. Her stare is instead unfocused. What she is seeing, or for that matter thinking, is a mystery. She manifests no obvious awareness of the presence of the painter, seeming to be preoccupied rather than attentive or alert.

Denner makes the transition from the far contour of the head to the background with softness and subtlety, thinning the paint layer gently so that the base color shows through to form the demarcation, rather than making a sharply drawn edge.
By this means he furthers the illusion of volume, which is successfully maintained throughout the image. His skill in manipulating light is partially responsible for his convincing representation of volume. Here, as in every 'Porendenner,' light falls from an unseen source located ahead and slightly to the left of the sitter. The third quarter of her face is thrown into shadow, although not so deeply as to render major features indistinguishable. As the light wraps around behind the sitter and reflects from the background onto the dark side of the face, the illusion of tangible, three-dimensional space becomes irresistible. The shallow space occupied by the sitter is rationally characterized by a light that is wholly logical and never capricious. This lighting scheme is thus not at all like the evocative chiaroscuro of a Rembrandt painting where light carries a message beyond definition and illumination of form and space. Denner employs light mainly in a formal role in this picture, although it undeniably contributes something to the evocative potential of this woman by throwing her face into partial shadow.

This is the picture which caused such a stir in Holland and England. Denner repeated the theme in a number of very similar paintings of heads called 'Porendenner' because of the exactitude of detail in rendering aged flesh in which every pore is recorded. Denner also made other head studies of old models with similar formats, but in much less excruciating detail. Besides these, he made portraits of old people which include more of the bust and sometimes even the hands. They also tend to be more broadly painted. The degree of fidelity
to almost microscopic detail which the Vienna Old Woman represents is not often attained, or even attempted. There are some head studies in which the format is similar to the Vienna picture, and although the handling is considerably less minute, they have traditionally been called 'Porendenner' by dealers and writers. I do not propose to reverse these traditional judgments; the borderline between what is and is not a 'Porendenner' is not only imperceptible, but probably a completely artificial construct. The head studies in general form one kind of continuum from most to least detailed, and a second continuum, not always congruent, from least to most expressive. There is excellent reason to believe that Denner made similar distinctions when he put prices on his paintings. In any case, I will discuss the head studies in two categories, while bearing in mind that these classifications have highly uncertain boundaries which occasionally overlap. The traditional definition of 'Porendenner' as it evolved in the nineteenth century came to describe format as much as technique, there are paintings called 'Porendenner' because of the short, bust-length format, but which are more freely handled than some of the head studies which include, for example, more of the torso. Thus, the first group is comprised by paintings sanctioned by the traditional definition of 'Porendenner.' The second group consists of head studies which deviate in format, some of which also display expressive intent. Stylistic qualities are the chief concern of this chapter; an attempt to arrive at the meaning of the head studies through examination of their context and sources is undertaken in the next.
The Old Woman in Vienna whose story and analysis introduced this chapter, provides a good point of departure for a discussion of the 'Porendenner' group. It is not known exactly when it was painted, only that the *terminus ante quem* is 1721, for Denner took it with him on his trip.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, at least five years separate this painting from its companion, the Old Man in Vienna, commissioned in 1725, signed in 1726. The dimensions and support of the pair are identical as is the compositional design. The man is shown in short bust-length, close to the picture plane and occupying most of the picture area. Again, only a small margin of neutral background is visible. For all their basic similarities, when seen side by side, the Vienna pendants exhibit a noticeable difference in intensity, clarity and detail. The acuteness and singularity of vision, the hypersensitive reproduction of surface texture in the earlier work yields to a softer, more summary treatment in the Old Man. Whereas in the Old Woman every detail is literally described in a one-to-one correspondence of brush strokes and nature, much more is left to optical suggestion in the Old Man. Granting that his is a fleshier facial type, there is nonetheless a different emphasis on rendering planes and areas of the face. In the pouches of skin in the lower parts of the eye sockets, for example, a crescent of high-value paint surmounting a smaller one of darker pink serves to characterize the highlights and texture of the skin at once. Where in the Old Woman, line, texture, and color combine in equal parts to describe the
surfaces and model planar transitions, in its pendant a reliance on patches of light and color makes for much grosser adjustments and softer effects.

Partly because he faces into the light, but mainly because of the differences in handling, the shape of the nose of the Old Man is less clearly articulated. In general the palpability of the forms is less than in the Old Woman. What tends to disguise the greater economy in the working up of forms is the extreme attention given to picking out superficial individual details, such as the hairs of the beard and eyebrows. An individual stroke of paint is laid down on the canvas for every hair in the fur collar he wears. Despite this attempt to make up for the "short-cuts" in the layering of paint to build up forms, this image suffers by comparison with its companion. The consequences are a loss in the absolute descriptive clarity of form and structure in the face, a weakening of the illusion of relief in the face, and a general loss in corporeal substance. What rescues the image to some extent are such things as the fine linear rendering of hair in the eyebrows and beard, and a sharply drawn highlight in the right eye. The beholder is tricked into believing that the rest of the head is as precisely and minutely recorded as these details.

It would be most convenient if we could draw the conclusion from this comparison that Denner's stylistic development consisted of an increasing breadth of handling and a decreasing reliance on draughtsmanship, in favor of a more painterly technique of optical suggestion. The evidence, however, does not conform to such a neat theory. One can detect an increasing
skill and sense of ease in Denner's formal portraits from one
decade to the next, as well as see the changes of fashion in
portraiture reflected in his works. A fairly reliable chronology
could be constructed for these based on stylistic evidence,
although the many dated works and documents make such an enter-
prise unnecessary. The head studies, however, are only occa-
sionally dated, and the few that are warn sternly against any
attempt to devise a chronology on the basis of style.\textsuperscript{14} Two
such paintings which seem very close in style might prove to
have been executed a decade apart, and two which seem styl-
istically remote may bear nonetheless the same date. A dis-
cussion of a painting once in Schwerin (fig. 27) in relation
to the Vienna pictures will prove this point.

The recipe for the ex-Schwerin picture is by now familiar;
a bust-length old man, turned left in three-quarter profile
against a neutral dark background. Like the \textit{Old Man} in Vienna,
he wears an open-necked shirt and fur-trimmed mantle. He has
an unforgettable balding moon-face with a gull-wing configura-
tion of wrinkles on his brow. His prominent eyes are half
covered with heavy languid lids which carve a deep semicircu-
lar depression into their sockets. His stubble seems to have
a day or two's edge on the Vienna \textit{Old Man}. He also turns into
the light so that much of his face is strongly illuminated.
That fact does not contribute here to a decrease in the defi-
nition of the features. Both texture and plasticity of form
are as emphatic here as in the \textit{Old Woman}. Transitions of
planes are modulated with a painstaking care. Rather than
juxtaposed patches of light and dark paint, as in the \textit{Old Man}
in Vienna, the values are subtly graded and merge almost imperceptibly. The nuanced relationship of the external cover of skin to the interior structure of bone and muscle is carefully characterized. It is clear that the bulge of flesh to the right of the model's nose is not stretched over bone, but is rather a pouch of pudgy flesh over muscle. The surface texture of the skin is minutely described, including a pair of warts on the right cheek and in the inner corners of the eyelids. The care taken in the building up of volumes, the particularization of the texture of the skin, and the tightly controlled transitions of color and light in the modeling of forms, draw this painting closer in style to the pre-1721 *Old Woman* than to her 1726 pendant. The ex-Schwerin picture, however, carries a date of 1731.

The distinctions in handling made between these three works are admittedly fine. These dated pictures do, however, represent a convenient spread of time, spanning the probable period of the main production of 'Porendenner.' The relationship they bear to one another's style argues against the possibility of devising a chronology based on stylistic development. The dated 'Porendenner' are in the minority, however, and these three paintings do not fully represent the range of styles found in the group as a whole. If we discuss the paintings in terms of a continuum from most tightly finished to most freely handled, we may well be in keeping with Denner's own scale of values; in his list of paintings for his picture lottery of 1746, he sets extremely high prices on those heads which are described as "sehr ausgearbeitet," while no comment at all accompanies the cheaper heads (see Appendix, below).
The Vienna **Old Woman** (fig. 32), the ex-Schwerin **Old Man** (fig. 33), and an **Old Woman** from Leningrad (fig. 19) serve as examples of the most meticulously executed 'Porendenner.' On the other hand, the **Portrait of an Old Man** in Hamburg (fig. 16) represents what might be the greatest breadth of handling and blurring of form that is still acceptable in the traditional classification of 'Porendenner.' Indeed almost every reference to the Hamburg painting made in the last two centuries calls it a 'Porendenner,' including the influential writer Alfred Lichtwark. It is likely that a great many of the head studies attributed to Denner and described as 'Porendenner' by the trade are similar to this Hamburg painting in a relatively generalized treatment of surface texture and lesser degree of plastic integrity of forms.

The Hamburg painting bears a signature but no date. It is approximately the same size as the Vienna pictures and, like them, painted on canvas. The model is dressed in the usual open-necked shirt and fur-trimmed mantle. However, the painting of the pelt and the fabric is much softer than in either the ex-Schwerin (fig. 27) or Vienna **Old Man** (fig. 33). The shirt is without crisp edges, and the folds are exceptionally fluid and undulating. The pelt is also much more broadly painted without the overlay of finely drawn lines to duplicate individual hairs as seen in the Vienna pictures. In fact, the extensive use of the two-haired brush (which is the likely tool for making the strokes of paint which are almost as fine as pen lines) in the finishing of the Vienna pictures, seems to have been abandoned here, except perhaps in the hair. A
comparison of the eyebrows of the Hamburg sitter with those of the Vienna Old Man illustrates this point. In the latter each brow hair is picked out in a dark or light stroke over a medium tone. In the Hamburg picture, a relatively undistinguished area of dark paint in which not a single hair is picked out serves to suggest the eyebrow.

A strangely thick atmosphere seems to cling to the Hamburg figure, eroding contours, and diminishing the perceptibility of surface texture. There is no incisive drawing in the wrinkles around the eyes, for example, and the contours of the ear are completely blurred. If this painting were a photograph, we would judge it to be out of focus.

In the collection of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig is a Portraithead of an Old Woman (fig. 4) which is close to the Hamburg picture in the softness of handling. The Braunschweig painting is on copper, which seems to be a support equally favored with canvas for the 'Porendenner.' The model, turned in three-quarter profile to the left, wears the usual white headcloth with a gold kerchief over it, but her mantle is trimmed with fabric instead of fur. Her garments are painted with a broad fluidity and softness similar to that of the Hamburg portrait. They form a decisive contrast with the crisp edges and carefully described surfaces of those belonging to the Old Woman in Vienna (fig. 32). The face of the Braunschweig woman is very softly painted. Where her skull is silhouetted against the background, the paint is gradually and subtly thinned until the base color is exposed as the positive indicator of contour. Although the Hamburg
picture exhibits an effect that is akin to sfumato by diminishing the clarity of edges through atmosphere, that is not quite the case in the Braunschweig picture. Instead the forms and textures tend to dissolve in the strong light which floods the model's face. This minimizes the pockets of shadow which tend to encroach on the Hamburg sitter fusing form with the surrounding space. The only sharp details in the Braunschweig picture are the crisp squares of white impasto which form glittering reflections in her eyes.

Max Friedländer once wrote,

Some masters are to be appreciated fully by single works, and do not gain in significance by a knowledge of their total production—for example, Terborch. Others are recognized in their full stature only from their entire work...17

While I cannot agree with either his judgment of Terborch or even the ultimate validity of his statement, I do think this observation contains some measure of truth. In the case of the 'Porendenner,' there are differing degrees of exactitude of rendering in between the extremes represented by the Vienna Old Woman (fig. 32) and the Hamburg Old Man (fig. 17), but otherwise these paintings are indeed extremely close variations on a single theme. Therefore, it would be a tedious and unnecessary exercise to continue to examine every one of the 'Porendenner' individually. The following discussion instead centers on a few examples which have been selected to represent the character of the group as a whole.

A Portrait of an Unknown Man in the Uffizi Gallery (fig. 15) corresponds to the formula for the male 'Porendenner' as described above, except for the cap worn by the sitter. It
is a peculiar affair with a velvet crushed crown and a brim of tightly curled Persian lamb which allows the artist to indulge himself in reproducing its innumerable tiny circles and spirals. There are many areas in this work in which the technique tends to be unusually dry and schematic. In the fur collar the lines are rather brittle, spiky, and criss-crossed, missing the ephemeral soft "furriness" of texture that Denner so successfully conveyed in the Vienna pendants. The shirt collar is also shot with criss-crossed threads of white which seem to be a unique feature in the Uffizi portrait. On the side of the neck are several ranges of diagonal white hatching which begin to describe the bands of flesh and creases, but as they approach the back of the jaw, they lose their function. The skin surface is rendered with an awesome degree of detail. The pores, which gave the 'Porendenner' their name, are especially apparent in this picture. Tiny pits in the skin are indicated with a sprinkling of minute points of dark paint, and the finest lines and wrinkles with dots and dashes of dark paint. Although the textures are for the most part convincing, the total effect of the image is disappointingly wooden. The surfaces may be meticulous and finely drawn, but their relation to underlying anatomy is not as sensitively observed as in the Vienna Old Woman (fig. 32). A good part of his face is cast into very deep shadows whose edges are harsh and abrupt. The nuances of partial shadows, so effectively rendered in the Vienna picture, are here consumed by a too-strong chiaroscuro. If the comparison to the Vienna Old Woman nonetheless seems close, it is surprising to observe the date of 1726 in the lower right corner, the same as that of her companion.
A pair of 'Porendenner' presently in Schleissheim (figs. 24, 25) are particularly striking in the coarse ugliness of their features. Yet the technique is relatively fine. Denner seems to incorporate a thicker layer of skin in the aging process here. In the Old Man pendant, the number and depth of the wrinkles by the eyes is exceptional. Deep furrows are excavated into the nose, forehead and upper lip of the Old Woman. The rugged and weatherbeaten appearance in the Schleissheim pictures is achieved by the use of a wider line for the wrinkles, and stronger than usual contrasts of light and dark paint. An extraordinary power and earthy quality is attained in these images, and the solidity and character of the Arbeiterbevölkerung is conveyed more strongly here than in any other 'Porendenner.'

That this impression is not a function of the peculiar physiognomies of the models, but due rather to the artist's interpretation, is seen in a comparison between the Schleissheim Old Man and a Portrait of an Old Man in Berlin-Dahlem (fig. 2). The models of these two pictures bear an extremely close resemblance to one another; in fact, with identically shaped noses, and the odd flame-shaped depression in the forehead, they seem to be the same person. Yet in the Berlin picture the sitter seems much less robust and weatherbeaten. His skin looks softer, and the creases are carved much less deeply into the surface. The effect is far less aggressive and bold than in the Schleissheim portrait.

Partly because he is seen in near profile, and his eyes are not directed toward the spectator, the sitter of the
Portrait head of an Old Man in Braunschweig (fig. 3) seems even more remote than the Berlin sitter. He seems unusually thoughtful and introverted amongst the other 'Porendenner.' While the surfaces of Denner's paintings are always shiny, this one painted on polished copper gleams like an enamel; the sitter seems to be sealed off from his audience as if by a pane of glass. The paint is laid in a soft and creamy manner. Whereas the surface texture of the epidermis tends to call attention to itself in some of the 'Porendenner' such as the Uffizi picture (fig. 15), here it is wedded intrinsically with the endodermis. The modeling neither remains on the surface nor breaks it with deep excavations. It takes into account the natural responsiveness of skin, its varying thicknesses and its reactions as elastic tissue. Thus one loses the sense of skin as surface in favor of the implication of flesh beneath a visible surface. The wrinkles of the forehead do not seem drawn on, but the skin itself seems to ripple. These distinctions are admittedly fine, but I believe they are characteristic of Denner's most successful pictures.

What should be noted about the head studies is the respect with which the artist approaches his subject. There is never the least suggestion of caricature or exaggeration of irregular features in the 'Porendenner.' Denner does not force an expression onto the faces of his models, yet they do not seem vacuous. They have their thoughts and their feelings, but they are allowed to retain a psychological privacy. Denner does not intrude into or probe their minds. Nor are the elderly models exploited for the purpose of making an overt statement
on the nature of transient beauty, as in the Giorgione/Titian "La Vecchia" in Venice. Although the notion of old age surely had a meaning for Denner's audience, any explicit moralizing significance in this area so closely tied to Holland would be much more likely to show up in the form of an allegorical genre theme, such as the "Procuress."

Under the rubric of 'Porendenner' there do exist marked differences in the minuteness of detail, in the approach to descriptions of form and surface, in the relative crispness or vagueness of the image. It might be worthwhile to refresh our memory of Denner's conventional portraits. How distant are these old men and women from those refined and idealized images? A major difference is the approach to surface texture. In the formal portraits the skin is as smooth and fresh as a baby's no matter the age of the sitter. The complexion is ivory tinged with rose and then polished to a shiny, porcelain-like finish. That rosy pink which glows on the cheeks of Denner's aristocratic models, and which is ubiquitous in fashionable Rococo portraiture, plays an ironic role in the 'Porendenner.' Instead of enhancing a cosmetic blush, the pink is used in the old heads to map out the broken capillaries by the eyes, and to render patches of raw skin, chapped and weathered. The same florid pink indicates the flush of blood visible through skin that has been made transparent with age and the shrinkage of the subcutaneous layer of fat.

The unexcavated features, applied to the surface of an ovoid head that characterizes Denner's formal portraits, have little in common with the deeply creased eyelids, the hollow
cheeks, the bulbous noses of the 'Porendenner.' That ideal, over-fed, cosmetic flattery of the formal portraits could not be more antithetical to the objective, unremitting observation of nature that is the hallmark of the 'Porendenner.'

If we look for a moment to the Portrait of Burgomeister Clemens Samuel Lipstorp (fig. 44), the tremendous difference between even the simplest kind of formal portrait and the 'Porendenner' will become abundantly clear. Although the sitter is no longer young, Denner avoids any physical symptoms of aging. The flesh is pudgy, smooth and firm. No tell-tale creases appear by his eyes or lips to indicate to us that Lipstorp ever changed his expression from the one we see of contented well-being. The ideal face of the age is as fresh, unlined and well-fleshed as a baby's. What a contrast Lipstorp's image makes with the old men and women upon whose faces the years are writ so plainly.

With the differences between the formal portraithead and the extreme naturalism of the 'Porendenner' firmly in mind, it is not difficult to see why the next head studies to be considered are related to the 'Porendenner' despite their less exacting technique. There are a number of studies of old people which do not fit comfortably into the 'Porendenner' classification, yet which lack the coherence to comprise a distinctive group in themselves. Some differ only slightly from the 'Porendenner' in format, but exhibit much looser technique than even the Hamburg picture (fig. 16). Others are aberrant in composition, and still others seem to embody an expressive intention not compatible with the 'Porendenner.'
A few of the pictures are unique types, while others tend to fall into small groups with basic similarities.

A pendant pair of an old man and woman in Stockholm (figs. 30, 29) make a good point of departure because of their overall similarity to the 'Porendenner.' The female member of this couple is more like them than the male, partially because he wears a full beard which also hides his garments, while she wears the familiar fur-trimmed mantle and headgear. These pictures are quite small, although within the size range of the 'Porendenner.' The figures are set further back from the picture plane, and their busts are truncated in the region of the ribcage. They, like the 'Porendenner,' are illuminated by an artificial source in front of them and to the left. The man wears some sort of bulky garment which is rendered with long loose brush strokes. His hair and long beard are nearly white, and they display none of the linear technique, the drawing with paint, found in the 'Porendenner.' Instead the brush strokes are free and cursive, if not really broad, building up a fluffy texture by layering of paint, rather than laboriously duplicating each individual hair. The skin surface is also generalized. Wrinkles can be detected, but they are suggested rather than drawn, by pebbly daubs of dark and light paint and gentle fluid strokes. Cast into shadow, the eyes stare ahead unfocused. A hint of the pietistic, mystical mood is present, an attempt by Denner to evoke the other-worldly thoughts of the sitter and make them known to the spectator.

In the female pendant, however, the evocative content is minimal. She even seems to make eye contact with the spectator,
but we are never quite sure if she is really looking at us. The emphasis in this painting is not on the model's thoughts, but on her physical appearance. Denner's brushwork is seldom more liquid than it is here. Long sweeping strokes of white form the headcloth, and smooth pasty areas of paint define the features. A somewhat disturbing contrast is formed by the detailed and precise treatment of her fur collar with the soft generalized handling in her face. Another odd feature is the apparently capricious contrasts between very crisp edges in parts of the headdress and fuzzy contours in other parts of the image.

A large Bust Portrait of an Elderly Man in Braunschweig (fig. 5) is quite similar in feeling to the Stockholm Old Man. There is a good deal of resemblance between the sitters, and the Braunschweig model has the same kind of long full beard, curly and white. There is a closer relationship to Dutch painting here than in other examples mentioned thus far. Denner uses impasto rarely, but it is in evidence here in several parts of the face, notably in the left temple. By utilizing the texture of the oil paint itself, Denner achieves an added richness in the rendering of the hair and beard. The examples of the broad-mannered followers of Rembrandt, and perhaps even Hals seem to be affecting Denner here.

The tightly descriptive brushwork of the 'Porendenner' is banished from this image. It is supplanted by an optically suggestive manner where pictorial means operate with greater independence of the forms they represent. Light and color take precedence over line in conveying form and surface texture.
This difference is clearly seen in the mouth which is merely a few dark strokes of brown and red. The area around the eyes is built up with short strokes of color which mix in the viewer's eye rather than on canvas to depict the socket and the crow's-feet. It is not a picture to be scrutinized from a few inches away as the 'Porendenner' clearly are meant to be. Both because of its larger size and the broader fattura, it has none of the preciosity of the 'Porendenner.'

There are few substantial differences between the Braunschweig Old Man, the male pendant in Stockholm, and a Portrait of an Old Man with a Grey Beard in Dresden (fig. 14). The latter picture is small, like the Stockholm painting, and it has a terminus ante quem of 1722 when it was first recorded in an inventory. The sitter has a bushy beard and abundant hair, and is lit in the standard manner of the 'Porendenner.' It is difficult to judge the technique from the poor photograph available, however, it is apparent that the handling is relatively broad, the brush strokes easily discernible. The expression in the eyes is intense and fervid, and one senses a religious content, although it is not specified. This quality of expression is to some extent evident in the Stockholm Old Man, but when juxtaposed to his pendant, the effect is strongly negated. Were it not for his contemporary garb, the Dresden picture might be taken for an Apostle portrait, a type which van Dyck and others had produced in great numbers in the seventeenth century; such a possibility does not really present itself in the case of the Braunschweig portrait. There are indeed religious pictures attributed to Denner in the teens and
later. While some of the attributions of such paintings in the trade are untenable, contemporary records indicate that Denner made some half-length Magdelens, and a St. Jerome among other religious subjects. A picture in the trade which was convincingly attributed to Denner was called a "Portrait of a Russian Ecclesiastic." Its description included the remark that it was painted "In the artist's early manner before he painted in excessive detail." What is definitely ecclesiastical or Russian about the model is a good question. Nothing in the picture or the catalogue description explains such an appellation. The painting does bear a certain similarity to the Dresden picture in overall composition and type, but the "Russian" is somewhat more extravagantly garbed and has wildly flowing hair and beard. It is of a larger size than the Dresden picture, although it is smaller than the Braunschweig portrait.

It is not clear whether either the so-called "Russian Ecclesiastic" or the Dresden Head of a Man is intended as a religious picture in the sense of a Biblical illustration or a contemporary clerical portrait. However, both of these pictures seem to be attempts to create an intensity of feeling and expression in their presentation of an old model, whereas the 'Porendenner' and the Braunschweig portrait are more concerned with recording physical appearance.

To explore this issue further, we might turn to a group of paintings of the same model in which the quality of religious feeling varies between being vague and explicit. Most interesting in this regard is a large painting on copper of an old man in East Berlin (fig. 1). A signature and date of 1720 are found to the right of the figure's neck. This painting
deviates sharply from the 'Porendenner' compositions. The sitter is portrayed fully to the waist, turned three-quarters to the left. His left hand is pressed to his breast and his right rests on a table holding a hat with a domical crown and a wide circular brim. Behind him hangs a drape which is pulled away at the left side to reveal a very dark landscape (almost indiscernible in this photograph, but the dark area near the arm and shoulder of the figure is a grove of trees; the horizon line comes in about the height of his index finger, and the rest is night sky). The figure is dressed in a plain jacket without any fur trim, and his open-necked shirt is like those worn in the 'Porendenner.' The head is carefully painted in sharp detail, but not with quite the same obsessive attention to linear detail as in the 'Porendenner.' The drawing and contours are crisp and forceful, and the focus is exceptionally clear. The illumination is accomplished by the typical arrangement, but the effect is more like a spotlight because the flesh is brightly contrasted with large expanses of dark tones.

It is the expression of the face combined with the piety of the gesture which charges this painting with exceptional emotion. Although the 'Porendenner' models stare off at nothing in particular, they merely seem pensive or preoccupied. Here the gaze has a strong suggestion of the religious visionary. The eyes seem fired by other-worldly inspiration.

A nearly exact replica of this painting is presently in the Hermitage. I know it only in photographs, but am confident nonetheless that it is autograph. There is one significant
difference in the Leningrad picture: instead of holding a hat in his right hand, the man holds a skull. Irene Geisemeier suggests that the hat in the East Berlin picture is an article of Mennonite attire.\textsuperscript{22} She is basically correct in this observation; however it is also true that it is a type of hat by no means worn exclusively by Mennonites, for other peasants who had no connection with the sect wore similar hats.\textsuperscript{23} It is not, in any case, a Mennonite preacher's official hat, a type which can be seen in Jacob Denner's portrait of his grandfather in Copenhagen. It seems clear enough that there is religious content implicit in both the East Berlin and the Leningrad pictures, but we can only speculate on its exact nature.

We do not know whether the Berlin picture precedes the one in Leningrad. No X-rays have been taken of the Berlin picture, and no signs of overpainting in the area of the hat are visible to the naked eye (fig. 50). The relationship between these two pictures remains a mystery.

In any case, the Leningrad picture with the skull is a type of portrait which finds antecedents as early as the Renaissance in Germany. Barthel Bruyn made several portraits of men with their hands resting on a skull.\textsuperscript{24} This type is also found in the works of Thomas de Keyser, and Cornelis de Vos.\textsuperscript{25} The Hamburg portraitist, Joachim Luhn (ca. 1640-1717), holds a skull in his own self portrait in \textit{The Painter and his Family} in Braunschweig.\textsuperscript{26} Gerard Dou's \textit{Self-Portrait} in the Uffizi employs the skull motif.\textsuperscript{27} Most striking is a comparison with a painting in Budapest called \textit{Man with a Death's-Head}, by Joannes Kupezky (fig. 51). This work portrays a young man.
standing in an interior in front of an arched window which gives out into the night. He turns his head toward us and raises his left hand in which he holds a skull. The gesture of the hand, even the specific disposition of the fingers, strongly resembles that in Denner's pictures. The nocturnal setting, while it does not correspond in every particular to that of the Denners, is nonetheless kindred in feeling. Kupezky's pictures bears no date, and its whereabouts in the eighteenth century is unknown. It is, however, quite close in overall feeling to the Leningrad picture, and cannot be too distant in time.

The East Berlin and Leningrad sitter reappears in at least two other paintings. One belonged to a large pendant pair in Dresden but was lost in the war. The other, a Bust-portrait of an Old Man, is in Bremen (fig. 8). This latter canvas is of odd proportions for Denner's work, much taller in relation to its width. Consequently more of the bust is seen, to the mid-ribs cage. Not only is the sitter obviously identical to the East Berlin model, but his head is presented in exactly the same position. If indeed a preliminary drawing had been made for one of these paintings, it would have served equally well for the other; unfortunately, despite the greatness of the number of sheets preserved from Denner's hand, none can be securely tied to any of the paintings of old people, 'Porendenner' or otherwise. Perhaps the Bremen painting was a replica of part of the Berlin or Leningrad picture. In any case, the handling in the Bremen portrait is freer and more painterly. Short pasty strokes are used to build up the hair and beard. The paint on the face is thickly applied and
left with a rough textured surface. The skull contour is very soft and there is a general out-of-focus quality in the face. His piercing stare, which is so very like that of the Berlin picture, is all the more effective as it glitters through the blurred forms.

The Dresden portrait is signed and dated 1731 (fig. 9). Its companion piece (fig. 10) is unsigned. These are relatively large canvases, and the figures are presented half-length. The woman turns her face back toward the observer, but the head of the man is aligned with the near-profile left turn of his body. His head is thus seen from a slightly different angle than in the Berlin and Bremen pictures. Considered by himself, the man gives the impression of inspired thought. His eyes glisten and his attention is not directed to his present surroundings. The chiaroscuro is particularly dramatic, the bright lighting of the head seeming to take on a spiritual significance. It seems to have an almost supernatural quality in its intensity and directedness, breaking so brilliantly on his face and forming an aura behind his head.

Taken together, the old man and woman make a strange pair. She faces the observer with a heavy matter-of-fact look. She seems rather weary and earth-bound, partaking in none of the extraordinary emotional tenor that emanates from her companion. The illumination is much more even in her portrait, devoid of the peculiar intensity found in her pendant.

It might be worthwhile to interject here a few words about the nature of Denner's pendant pairs. The reader has probably noticed from the Vienna (figs. 32, 33), Stockholm
(figs. 29, 30), and Schleissheim pendants (figs. 24, 25) that Denner makes not the slightest attempt beyond matching size and composition, to establish a relationship between the sitters. In some of the pairs, the female looks toward the spectator, in others, the male. Both of the Vienna sitters look toward the audience, but in the Schleissheim pendants, the models stare off in opposite directions. In some cases, such as in the above-mentioned pair, there is a marked distinction of mood and expression. Occasionally, such as in a second pair in Dresden (figs. 12, 13), we find a notable difference in the handling, where the female is meticulously rendered, but the male is painted with a much freer brush.

Both of the canvases in the 1731 Dresden (figs. 9, 10) pair display an extreme degree of freedom for Denner in the application of paint. The woman's skin is roughly brushed with small daubs and dashes of color which lend a pitted appearance to the skin, especially on the bridge of the nose, the cheeks and beside the mouth. Denner had just returned from Amsterdam the year before these pictures were painted. It is likely, from the appearance of this pair, that he had been looking at the works of Frans Hals. The long streaks of paint which record the tracks of the brush as much as they suggest form, the energetic rapidity of the brushwork in the garment of the woman, and in the shirt of the man resemble Hals' technique. Even more reminiscent of Hals is the treatment of the white fabric of the woman's bonnet. The bold dashes of fluid white impasto picking out the highlights over a film of transluscent grey could well derive from Hals. This
great Dutch portraitist seems also to be the likely source for Denner's method of indicating hair with light and dark streaks over a neutral base color. Denner's painting seldom displays these mannerisms in works dated much before or after this pair. It seems fair to conclude that during his stay in Amsterdam he had admired works by Hals and they had made a brief but strong impression on his paintings.

Denner's perception of Hals' technique was by no means superficial. It did not consist merely of a lot of slashing paint strokes. Instead, Denner assimilated here—if only for a moment while the impression was fresh—Hals' complex and demanding method of building up form. Hals' technique can be seen in Denner's use of flicks of contrasting paint, which when scrutinized, delineate no contours, yet from a distance can be seen to model forms with a vigor and intensity unattainable with descriptive drawing. On the lower eye socket of the Dresden man, for example, is a pair of dashes of color which in themselves represent nothing, but which mix in the observer's eye to model the lower edge of the orbit. This kind of painting, divorced from drawing, is antithetical to the finished technique of the 'Porrenberger.'

The artist achieves a synthesis of bold technique and intensity of expression in his Portrait of an Old Woman in Hamburg (fig. 17), one of Denner's most compelling images. A relatively large canvas, it portrays the model half-length, turned slightly to the right with her hands resting on a cane. Her head is turned away from the light and much of her face is cast into deep shadow. The left side of her head and her
hands, however, are brilliantly lighted. A few parts of her face, such as the side of her nose and lips are also picked out of the shadows. Huddled over her cane, the nervous haunted look of this woman is almost aggressive. Although she peers out at nothing in particular, she somehow seems accusing. If any of Denner's old men or woman have a claim to psychological content, this Hamburg portrait must certainly be the prime contender. The jagged light flickering erratically over the image, picking out random edges to highlight against pockets of strong shadows, the shaded eyes with their wary look are unusually bold means of characterization for Denner. The unruly hair rebelling at the tight restraint of the headband, and the hunched posture add to the effectiveness of the picture.

What is perhaps the most remarkable feature of this portrait is the hands (fig. 54). Not only does Denner present their time-ravaged epidermis, but also the entire substructure of the hands; the tissues have lost their firmness and elasticity, collapsing over the veins and tendons. Across the knuckles the skin is no more than a web connecting the skeleton of the fingers. Not a ligament, tendon or blood vessel is omitted. The colors are hideously glowing oranges, florid pinks and reds. Denner's brutal observation makes these hands simultaneously repellent and fascinating.

We have seen how the artist of the 'Porendenner' can be disciplined and detached, making his paintings an objective mirror of his models. Yet there is another side to Denner's naturalistic observation, as the Hamburg Portrait of an Old
Woman demonstrates. His unremitting realism can be both brutal and eloquent in the expression of a meaning beyond visual or physical fact.
A number of questions must be considered in an interpretation of Denner's head studies: What are the artistic precedents which provide sources for these pictures, and what is the extent of Denner's reliance upon them? Why did Denner choose to create such images? Were there other currents operating in the contemporary culture which might either parallel or provide insight into the nature and purpose of Denner's paintings? Some of the answers to these questions apply equally to both the 'Porendenner' and the other head studies, while other issues clearly will concern one group more than the other. I wish to emphasize that this chapter constitutes not an explanation of the meaning of the head studies, but rather an exploration. Thus certain provocative issues may be raised, but relatively little developed. There are cases in which we can instantly detect an essential kinship of a particular contemporary phenomenon with Denner's artistic concerns. Yet the sense of the comparison becomes lost if we try to force a specific point by point correspondence.

To a degree Denner's head studies combine three distinct, but compatible iconographic types. One is the realistic bürgertlich bust portrait as seen in Dürer's oeuvre as well as
in Holland in the seventeenth century. Another, which applies obviously only to the male studies, is the portrait head of an Apostle, seen in the works of Hans-Baldung Grien and Anthony van Dyck (see Appendix, ii) among others. The third is the portrait of an elderly person interpreted as a genre figure, as in Rembrandt's works. This type was sometimes shown reading or otherwise occupied, but in many instances is not engaged in any activity. It would be a mistake to limit the discussion of sources to iconographical issues alone, for the work of earlier masters seems to have interested Denner for many other reasons.¹

One can, for example, trace the roots of Denner's unremitting realism in the portrayal of the human face back to Albrecht Dürer. We also sense in Dürer's painting the graphic foundation of his style. Precisely observed and recorded, his images tend toward a literal minuteness of description. Denner's relationship with Dürer's art can be demonstrated by citing a pair of works by the Renaissance master which are presently in Berlin-Dahlem. The first is the well-known charcoal drawing of the artist's mother from 1511. Beyond the obvious similarities in the type of headdress and the bust-length turned to three-quarters profile, there is a brutal realism in Dürer's vision which Denner later displayed in his head studies. Not a sag or wrinkle is spared from relentless exposure. No concession is made to flattery. The brow lacerated with deep wrinkles, the unruly hairs of the eyebrows are painstakingly and emphatically described. Dürer carefully
characterizes the appallingly sharp protrusion of the cheekbone and the depth of the hollow it shelters. The slack skin of the neck reveals more than it conceals of the bones and ligaments it covers; it reminds us of the hands leaning on the cane in Denner's Old Woman in Hamburg. Dürrer's genius enables him to instill an extreme pathos in this portrait without giving the sitter a specific or active expression. The 'Porendenner' never aspire to this level of expressiveness, nor do Denner's other head studies ever achieve it.

The second work by Dürrer which is especially relevant to Denner's art is a Portrait of Jacob Muffel of 1526 in Berlin-Dahlem. The fact that we know this is specifically a portrait of a particular individual affects our understanding of the picture, but it is nonetheless true that the overall appearance of the panel resembles the 'Porendenner.' The bust is presented in three-quarters profile set against a plane of color. It is lit from the front and slightly to the left. The model is dressed in a jacket trimmed with fur. The pelt is rendered with the loving attention to individual hairs which is later exhibited by Denner. Every hair on the head is drawn separately, as though painted with a pen. With amazing sensitivity, Dürrer duplicates every nuance of form in the face. A prominent vein in the temple is carefully reproduced. Dürrer perfectly captures the bony presence of the cranium beneath the skin of the forehead, and differentiates the thicker, unsupported flesh of the cheeks. The affinities between the two artists are readily apparent, as is the difference between genius and talent.
Less obvious than the technical similarities between these two artists is a certain affinity of artistic temperament. Neither of these artists found idealization a congenial mode of pictorial expression. Dürer's portraits faithfully recorded the features of the sitter—for better or for worse. Paradoxically Dürer's quest for a formula for perfect beauty was obsessive, but one need only glance at the face of Eve in the great engraving *The Fall* to see how Dürer's attempts at creating an ideal type from his imagination yielded results far less graceful than Raphael's or Cranach's. Denner was also too sympathetic to nature to succeed in creating a beautiful ideal from her appearance. What he chose to portray, when not under the pressure of any commission, was the ordinary, often unlovely, side of nature. Yet Denner chose a career as a formal portraitist in which flattery was a prime requirement. He duly corrected the shape of the head to an oval, made the eyes wide and prominent and the lips like delicate rosebuds. Yet seldom do the faces, which he "improves" by subjecting them to this formula, approach the loveliness and charm of faces painted by his French colleagues, Boucher and Nattier, even though they subscribe to an almost identical formula for ideal beauty. It is as if Denner, and Dürer before him, were so vitally committed to nature that any betrayal of her appearance by an alteration of her forms was anathema. One suspects they armed themselves with formulae and approached the creation of ideal beauty as a conflict, rather than lovingly coaxing it into being. In the last analysis, each of these artists was at his best when he turned his imagination to the
specific character of the individual rather than to the anonymous impersonal ideal.

It is particularly gratifying to find such a relationship underlying the art of Dürer and Denner. Each of them remained thoroughly bürgerlich, although they were often occupied with court commissions. While Dürer was the great artist of the first wave of bürgerlich reform, Denner, two hundred years later, was to be a major exponent of the second. (Unfortunately, a full development of this parallel falls outside the scope of this thesis.)

It might be noted that there were other German Renaissance masters who painted heads of old men. Several such paintings are preserved, the elderly sitters portrayed bust length against plain backgrounds. Most of these old men lack any specific attributes, but it is likely that at least some were intended to represent Apostle heads, a popular theme in the period. This would go far in explaining the paucity of old women's heads. We might single out just one worthy example from the many, an Apostle Head by Hans Baldung-Grien in Berlin-Dahlem (fig. 52). The bust length format is in every way typical of the 'Porendenner.' Baldung-Grien's linear technique displayed in the abundant hair and beard foreshadows Denner's fastidious style. Such an example demonstrates that the German tradition provided ample prototypes for analogous compositions, even if there may be no overt iconographic relationship.

The strength of Denner's connection with Holland has already been emphasized, and its importance in providing
sources for the 'Porendenner' should not be underestimated. Dutch Baroque art is rich with paintings of old people which might have been an inspiration to Denner. It is important to keep in mind during a discussion of these that even in Denner's earlier years, he would have had easy access to Dutch paintings. He could have seen them in Hamburg where van Mieris and Dou were avidly collected, in Berlin, in the collections of courts for which he worked, and in Holland which he briefly visited in 1714.

The bust portrait of an elderly model makes frequent appearances in the oeuvre of Jan Lievens. A Portraitbust of an Old Man in Braunschweig (fig. 53) is a representative example. Since this picture was in the collection by 1710, it is likely Denner would have seen it when he painted for the Braunschweig court in 1718. The similarity of the image and format to the 'Porendenner' is obvious, but the more emotional and evocative approach is closer to Denner's Old Man in Stockholm (fig. 30).

It is in the paintings of Rembrandt that this type comes to fruition. A fascination with old age is a leitmotif of his career. Some typical early examples of Rembrandt's portraits of elderly men are the so-called Rembrandt's Father, private collection, Holland; An Old Man in a Cap, The Hague; and Head of a Man, Kassel. The composition in each of these is similar, an old man presented bust-length turned three-quarters. The heads are turned to a more or less frontal view. Even at this early stage in his career, Rembrandt's technique is a great deal broader than that of the 'Porendenner.
The rough clotted texture of paint is used to depict the bumps and hollows of the face. Unlike Denner, he avoids completely the practice of drawing with his brush. Color and light do not so much form the image on the canvas as in the spectator's eye. Rembrandt's pronounced chiaroscuro performs an independent, almost narrative, function besides modeling form and producing the illusion of depth and volume. Light seems to invade the minds of the figures, instilling them with a meaning beyond visual fact. Dürer's portraits might tell much about the character and worldly importance of his sitter, but Rembrandt's figures communicate their spirit. The verism of the image of a wizened, wrinkled face, is only a by-product of Rembrandt's aim to penetrate the psychology of his model and create a spiritual presence.

The 'Porendenner' do not seem affected by Rembrandt's examples. Only when Denner's handling is at its broadest and his content most expressive does he manifest any consciousness of this master. In the Vienna museum is a painting supposedly of Rembrandt's mother to which Denner's Old Woman in Hamburg (fig. 17) probably owes some debt. Rembrandt chose an oval format in which to represent his very old and weary model who rests her hands on a cane just as in Denner's Old Woman. The resemblance goes no further. Rembrandt's sitter is bathed in crepuscular golden light which flickers warmly over the face and hands. His is a tender approach, engrossing the viewer and evoking a sympathetic response. Denner's image is aggressive and repellent. It does not allow for a relationship to grow between the subject and the viewer. Denner's
colors are harsh and colder, his textures slicker and impenetrable. Furthermore, his lighting is stark and white rather than gentle and golden. In this woman's face, couched in shadow, we sense a suspicious, even a hostile attitude. Even the rendering of the hands (fig. 54), which is the glory of the Hamburg picture, cannot be compared with the painterly economy of Rembrandt's hands without seeming obsessive and distracting.

It can be said that Denner's relationship to Rembrandt is only superficial. Denner simply was unable to convey the depth of human experience implied in Rembrandt's work, and wisely, he seldom spent his energies seeking this profundity. Rembrandt's pupils, in whose works the master's message was moderated considerably, were probably of greater concern to Denner. One of Rembrandt's German pupils who might have made an impression on Denner is Christopher Paudiss. Born in Hamburg in 1625, Paudiss was in Rembrandt's studio toward the middle of the century. In his later travels through Germany and Austria, he was an important disseminator of the style of the Rembrandt school. Most of his work is in Vienna and Freising where he spent the last decades of his life. There is a handful of paintings which were once attributed to Denner, but which now have been correctly and securely placed in Paudiss' oeuvre. This artist was fond of making portraits of old men, always with the examples of his master firmly in mind. One significant difference in their interpretation of this subject is that while Rembrandt's models often tend to be dressed in exotic garb trimmed with luxurious, if battered or
tarnished, accessories, Paudiss' old men and women are undisguisedly plebeian. Typically, Paudiss' model wears a peasant's jacket and hat, and looks rather rustic, as if he were a Tagelöhner, spending his days out of doors. A Portrait of a Bearded Man in Vienna (fig. 55) is a representative example of this type. Wearing a dilapidated hat with a high crown and an old peasant jacket, this man would feel out of place in a Rembrandt portrait. He gazes out of the picture from shadows cast by the brim of his hat. The light is trapped in his luxurious beard and glows in pools on the face. His expression is not much different from Denner's Stockholm Old Man (fig. 30). But Paudiss' handling is based on Rembrandt's technique of building up areas of thickly textured paint for a granular surface. It is a technique Denner seems not to have used.

It was Gerard Dou, more than any other single painter, whose influence can be felt in the 'Porendenner.' Dou was a pupil of Rembrandt's whose meticulously executed genre scenes and genre portraits of old people brought him great fame. Although his genre scenes are replete with emblematic significance, as we might expect from an artist who lived his entire life in Leiden, his portraits of the elderly aim for the evocative spirituality of Rembrandt's without much success. He was in Rembrandt's studio in the late twenties when the master's manner was at its most tightly finished. This exposure to the early Rembrandt style combined with Dou's youthful training as a glass engraver was instrumental in his development of Feinmalerei, a precise and minutely detailed technique
of painting. His surfaces gleam like enamel, and his meticulous craftsmanship gives his subjects a jewel-like attractiveness. Their precious effect is further enhanced by their small size, usually about half the size of the 'Porendenner.'

Dou's paintings enjoyed an amazing popularity both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Collectors all over Europe tended to prize his works above those of Rembrandt's and paid more money for them. Indeed, Dou's pictures were easy to like. Attractive and pleasing images, they exhibited marvelously careful craftsmanship. Dou had many students who followed his manner, Gabriel Metsu and Frans van Mieris the Elder among them. Not surprisingly, in view of the market demand, independent imitators of Dou's Feinmalerei sprang up, especially in central Europe and Scandinavia. Protestant Germany was extraordinarily enthusiastic about Dou's style, and collectors avidly sought after the work of both the master and his followers. German artists were quick to respond to the seemingly insatiable market demand for Feinmalerei. The small pictures made by eighteenth century German artists after Dutch examples were referred to by William VIII of Hesse as "commoner's goods."

Doubtlessly Denner capitalized on this taste for Feinmalerei. Several writers go so far as to call him an imitator of Dou. Yet the special character of the 'Porendenner' is not explained satisfactorily by dismissing them as imitations of Dou's works. Neither does Denner make slavish copies of specific paintings by Dou nor emulate his favorite types. Denner's interpretation of his old people is fresh, personal
and distinctive, and it is also peculiarly embedded in its early eighteenth century context. We would not call Cezanne an imitator of Poussin, although the inspiration is undeniable. When there has been a re-thinking of the subject, a change in the intention, emphasis, and result, as I believe is the case with Dou and Denner, clearly the issue is not one of imitation.

Dou's output of portraits of the elderly was almost as prodigious as Denner's. They are not so straightforward, however. More often than not, Dou provided his models with some manner of exotic headgear, or portrayed them in some guise, as in Rembrandt's Father as Astronomer in Leningrad. Other elderly subjects he represented in genre pieces properly speaking, such as in Rembrandt's Father Sharpening his Pen in Hannover. Some of his sitters read in the Bible. However, Dou did make a few paintings in which the elderly model is presented simply, without attributes or activity. A fairly typical example of this sort is a bust portrait in Turin. It is a small painting on panel, the material Dou favored because it was so amenable to his obsessive love for perfect glossy surfaces. The sitter wears a velvet cap which strongly recalls one of Rembrandt's favorite studio props. He has a long full beard and curly hair which stands away from his head. The face was painted in laborious detail; we might be more apt to marvel at Dou's miniauturistic technique if our eyes had not been so recently exposed to the even more minute handling of the 'Porendenner.' Despite Dou's careful recording of the individual creases in the forehead and around the eyes, his duplication of every hair, we find his observation less acute,
his vision of nature less pessimistic, his lighting softer and more flattering than in the 'Porendenner.'

An oval panel by Dou in Berlin-Dahlem portrays an old woman (supposedly Rembrandt's mother) bust-length turned three-quarters to the left. Her head is slightly inclined and she gazes downward. She wears a headdress that is elaborate and specifically Dutch, but the fur trim on her mantle reminds us of Denner. This is one of Dou's most tightly worked paintings, a perfect specimen of Feinmaleri. One can scarcely make out the individual brushstrokes which describe the wrinkles of the skin and bumpy area of the chin. The fur is precisely painted and individual hairs can be picked out. Although it is not as compulsively drawn as the 'Porendenner,' it is far from Rembrandt's method of making thickly textured paint stand for fur. This picture exhibits a direction and logic of illumination similar to Denner's, but the golden crepuscular quality, and the warmth of its diffusion are alien to Denner's colder, clearer light. Finally, Dou's palette is golden and earthy, whereas Denner's is more vivid and orange. Further, Denner's neutral shades tend toward green and olive rather than the tan and brown characteristic of Dou.

If Dou's manner, subjects, and pictorial presentation bear certain similarities to the 'Porendenner,' his intentions do not. Dou made a large number of genre pictures of elderly people; the portraitbusts constitute merely one aspect of this production. The sitters in these, while closely observed, are bathed in a golden light which deaccentuates corporeal substance and heightens emotional qualities. Dou's virtuoso
handling of paint and polished surfaces, however, tend to make it more likely that the viewer will be found marveling at the precision and minuteness of technique rather than meditating on the emphatic, but ultimately superficial, spiritual content. Placed next to a work by his teacher, Dou's diligent effort to instill his image with emotional content seems feeble indeed. He produces frozen, denatured versions of his master's subjects. Try as he does to reveal the presence of the soul in his sitters, he never penetrates deeper than the skin. But the very fact that he strives for this deeper level of meaning separates his work from the 'Porendenner.'

Perhaps Denner was more sensitive to the essential difference between Rembrandt and his pupil Dou than most of his contemporaries. He certainly never attempted to combine perfection of surface and minute detail with strong emotional content. The 'Porendenner' are consciously devoid of apparent pathos. Their meaning is contained in and confined to the objectively observed appearance of the model. In the more freely handled head studies, he exploits the appearance of the model for expressive purposes. Surely he realized that Rembrandt's suggestive handling—although Denner's own "broad" manner was quite different—was more suited to the revelation of human spirit and divine mysteries. Denner was also cognizant of the limitations of Feinmalerei, and relied on the raw impact of unedited realism for the content of the 'Porendenner.'

There are two general trends developing in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century life and thought which are reflected and to some extent documented in the art of the period. At many points, the two phenomena are tangent and
even interdependent. They are so pervasive that one can perhaps only define them in terms of the symptoms which reveal their existence. One of these trends has to do with a reduction in the scale of life and to some extent, a reaction against the grandeur of the Baroque.

The other is an interest in naturalism which has a microcosmic rather than macrocosmic bias. The first of these drifts can be seen in such an event as the move from Versailles to the Paris hôtels. This also constitutes an escape from the cumbersome convolutions of court etiquette to a relatively more intimate order of existence. It can also be observed in the change in taste away from grand and stately Roman histories by Lebrun for example, to the small and delicate Fêtes Galantes by Watteau. The pomp and formality of van Dyck style portraiture gave way to a more relaxed, less haughty style in which the sitters loom less large and overpowering. Artists seduced their spectators rather than seeking to impress or overwhelm them. The tendency toward simplicity can be seen in northern Germany in the drift of the centers of cultural activity from the courts to the towns. In Hamburg the opera waned in popularity and the favorite musical entertainment became the chamber concert. 20

At the same time as life rhythms became simpler, man's relationship to nature became more intimate, and his investigation of her became oriented toward the particular rather than the general. The influential German philosopher Leibniz with his interest in infinitesimal calculus and his breakdown of the cosmos into monads illustrates this point. 21 The new and
widespread popularity of microscopy is another example. Dutch landscape painting gradually gave way in the eighteenth century to specific and accurate topographical studies. The Pronk still life, the expensive and elaborate displays of exotic fruit flowers and ornate tableware of the seventeenth century became less popular as the new fashion of more modest studies of common fruits and flowers gained ground.

We need look no further than Denner's close friend, Barthold Heinrich Brockes, for evidence of the artist's personal connection with an important exponent of these trends. This is the man whom Röthel calls the "personifizierte Zeitgeist" of Hamburg in the first half of the eighteenth century. His children sat for three separate portraits by Denner, and he himself was portrayed twice by the artist. Brockes was a city politician, a councilman and mayor of Hamburg. He was also a prolific writer. He translated Marino's Massacre of the Innocents from the Italian as well as works by contemporary French authors. Denner's portrait of Brockes was engraved for the frontispiece of the first edition of the Kindermord in 1715. Brockes' magnum opus was the nine volume Irdischen Vergnügens in Gott, roughly translating as "Earthly pleasures in God."

Brockes' works are indicative of the new use of nature in the literature of the early eighteenth century. Martin Opitz, the leading Baroque poet in Germany, had manifested a macrocosmic and summary view of nature. A landscape, when it made one of its rare appearances in his verse, tended to be described in general terms. His poetry lacked in concrete details
of land configurations, trees and the like. It certainly neglected to consider such minutiae as birds, flowers and insects. Nature is considered subordinate to and occasionally supportive of the content which deals primarily with man.\(^{24}\) One might liken his use of landscape to Giotto's in *The Lamentation* in the Arena Chapel; it is of no importance in itself but provides a backdrop or setting for man's actions. Brockes' approach, on the other hand, is specific and subjective. It is also imbued with pietistic convictions in that the purpose of the study of nature was the "knowledge and worship of God."\(^{25}\) This was an opinion shared by many scientists as well, without, however, any concomitant impairment of the accuracy of their observations. The fact that pietistic thinkers tended to regard the study of nature as one path to understanding the divine may make it more than coincidence that with the wildfire spread of pietism around the turn of the century came a wave of investigation of nature which took on a new intensity.\(^{26}\) Brockes' message was that nature deserved close observation of her moods, forms, smells and colors. He writes verses about moths and dung beetles, birds, apricot blossoms and the like. His method of examining a flower, as if through a magnifying glass, lead to lengthy descriptive passages of excruciating detail, and drew some criticism for pedantry. Quite interesting, and little discussed, is Brockes' poem about a fish-pond in which he sees the life in the pond as an analogue for the community of man, a consummately microcosmic notion.\(^{27}\)

For all of his objective observation, the title of the work and the numerous hymns interjected in the verses make it clear
that this celebration of nature was dedicated to God and to some extent meant as a path to knowing Him.

One might think that Brockes' pietism would not have had much appeal for Denner, the son of a Mennonite preacher. But while we know little about Balthasar's religious convictions, his father Jacob is known to have caused some comment for his promoting pietism in his sermons and writings.28 If indeed Balthasar was infected with the pietistic idea of studying nature to understand the divine, we might cautiously ascribe this as another aspect of meaning to his study of old people. In any case, we find that Brockes' method is comparable to Denner's. Each isolated the humble specimens of nature and described them concretely and minutely. The identity of Denner's aged models is no more central to the meaning of the picture than that of the moth is to Brockes' verse.

Brockes was an influential writer, but solidly bürgerlich, never setting out on an extreme or radical course, never controversial. Yet because of the friendship between Brockes and Denner, and because Brockes does in fact seem to embody the local ideas of the period, his importance for Denner's art cannot be discounted. In other parts of Germany and in German speaking Switzerland, there were new ideas brewing in literary circles which were much less conservative, either intellectually or stylistically. At least partially because of the political disunity of Germany after the Peace of Westphalia, there emerged nothing in the way of a powerful or pervasive literary current. Certain individuals and small groups, however, did publish creative and critical writings which were widely read.
Two of Denner's contemporaries in Zurich, Johan Jakob Breitinger and Johann Jakob Bodmer, were highly concerned with the issue of nature in literature and the other arts as well. Although they set forth their theories most cohesively and powerfully in Von dem Einfluss und Gebrauch der Einbildungskraft first published in 1727, their ideas were already in circulation some years before. They were quite different from Brockes with his religious view of nature which was so tender and hopelessly optimistic. Unconcerned with 'essences,' they championed the cause of faithful representation of the subject by accurate description of its external aspects. What could not be gauged by the senses was irrelevant. Not a trace of Brockes' moralism can be found in this statement made by Breitinger: "enjoyment should be derived from the faithful representation of a subject by itself sad, pitiful, ugly, disgusting, horrible, even revolting." Somewhere between the poles of Brockes' obsessive concern with accurate description of hyacinths and picturesque weatherbeaten cherry trees, and Bodmer and Breitinger's insistence on deliberate and unremitting confrontation with ugly images, lies sensibility manifest in the 'Porendenner.'

These two Swiss-Germans devoted many pages in several different works to the topic of nature, concluding basically that it is the task of all art to imitate nature. Fortunately, they obliged us with a discussion on the issue of comparison between poetry and painting, thereby providing a contemporary justification for this extraction. Reading Bodmer's and Breitinger's criticism in light of various other cultural
phenomena of the period makes one aware that they were verbalizing an idea that was already in the air. Observation of nature, in literature, painting or science, had become an acceptable pursuit in its own right, whether or not the underlying motives were religious. A withering leaf or wilted blossom in a Rachel Ruysch still life need not automatically signal the transience of things; it might only be the objective and accurate record of nature's process of decay. We must be very cautious; while the study of nature is at times an end in itself, we must realize that in the early eighteenth century there is the equal possibility that a religious motive may well be present. There are instances, like the 'Porendenner,' in which we are given very few clues to indicate which is the case.

A good deal about Denner's own attitude toward nature can be surmised from an examination of the kinds of projects he took up without the pressures or contingencies of commissions. First, it should be mentioned that Denner drew incessantly. Some of the sheets will be discussed below in another context, but the fact that the vast majority of the drawings are head studies from life is significant. He seems to have relied on his family for models, however, a few other faces appear with some regularity. There are even a few studies of casts of ancient sculpture. Almost all of these drawings in sanguine record only the head, and in amazingly painstaking technique in which the modulation of planes is accomplished with extremely fine hatching strokes. As we already know, the celebrated Vienna Old Woman was undertaken without a commission. Other head studies are also known to have been sitting in the studio
waiting for buyers. There are several still lifes of fruit and flowers from Denner's hand, some of which remained in his family after he died. At least one fine genre painting is securely assigned to Denner, and several others have been attributed.

A few of Denner's juvenile works have been preserved. They all testify to a pronouncedly naturalistic orientation, even during his student days. A delicate water color dated 1698 in Hamburg depicts a still life of apples (fig. 56). Some of the fruits are whole, others cut or peeled. On the left of the table lies a broken walnut, and to the right is a rohmer filled with rose-colored wine. If the drawing conveys little sense of volume, and if the inconsistent vantage point results in an oddly modern pictorial space, these are merely the results of the unpracticed hand of a fourteen year old. The boy has set himself difficult technical problems, especially attempting to duplicate the window reflections and transparency of the wine in the rohmer. The touch is sensitive and delicate, and the observation of humble nature is remarkable in one so young. Where the skin is removed, the flesh of the apples is dappled with brown spots. The cut half of the apple bears a resemblance to the type of illustration accompanying contemporary botanical treatises.

There are a few still life paintings of fruit or flowers dating from Denner's mature career, mainly in the thirties. They are remarkably attractive paintings, although photographs fail to convey their appeal. The Hamburger Kunsthalle has five still lifes by Denner, but I know of no others. One
might suspect that there are more such paintings by this artist masquerading under false attributions, for so few have come down to us and Denner's ability as a still life painter is little recognized. An unsigned flower piece was included in Denner's legacy to his artist children. A representative example of Denner's still life painting is a fruit piece in Hamburg (fig. 57). Grapes, plums, apples and peaches are casually arranged on a marble table and in a basket. There are peculiarities in the space and clarity of focus of this picture which recur in the flower piece mentioned above. (We will have occasion to speak of these problems at greater length below.)

Denner's interest in capturing nature in its humble forms is reflected in his painting of a Kitchenmaid, also in Hamburg (fig. 58). It is dated 1715, which puts it early in Denner's professional career; indeed the handling is very close to that of the East Berlin Old Man from 1720. This is a life-sized portrayal of an amply proportioned woman holding on her lap a large basket of Gebäck. Recalling that Denner spent several weeks in Holland in 1714, one is not surprised to find this painting in the next year. To a certain extent, the subject and some details of the handling of the basket and napkin seem to be Dutch intrusions into Denner's style at this time. The features of the woman can only be called plain. The forward direction of the arm, the oblique angles of the composition, the lively handling of paint in the napkin and the tilt of the woman's head all make for what should be an air of spontaneity. But the fleeting impression of lightheartedness is almost immediately denied by the fixed gaze and sorry
expression of the face. What in Holland might be an excuse for apple red cheeks and a rather comforting, if stereotyped, character of a robust and cheery motherly figure bearing good things to eat, is not taken up by Denner. He gives us, instead, a weary and sad woman, whose isolation against a large expanse of somber grey-green background lends a special poignancy to the image. This humble and heavy servant is imbued with an individuality and dignity that is also characteristic of the head studies. Denner neither exaggerates nor editorializes in this picture, letting the woman speak for herself, and in this lies its power to move the audience. Denner's interpretation of nature is serious and searching, never lighthearted.

His genre painting, life drawings of heads, studies of animal life, fruit and flower pictures, along with the 'Poren-denner,' provide the clues to Denner's relationship to nature. In them he is neither particularly attracted to models which are beautiful in themselves, nor does he alter nature's forms toward a beautiful ideal. His approach is perhaps more scientific than aesthetic; his aim is to record what he sees, not exploit what he sees for either sentimental or decorative purposes. He lets his subjects tell their own stories, and perhaps this is why he chose to paint old faces: they seem to have so much to tell. Not that Denner is merely an illustrator or devoid of imagination, but he does impose strict limitations on his interpretation of nature. It should be stressed that these nature studies of Denner's are fundamentally different from his formal portraits. The latter required Denner to lie about what he saw. All irregularities in feature,
signs of age or nature's accidents had to be purged from the image. It was not Denner's skill in making a convincing likeness that the German princelings were so anxious to purchase, but rather his flattery and tact. Stripped of her cosmetics and luxurious silks, many an aging Herzogin probably could have done duty as a model for a 'Porendenner.' But Denner knew his business well enough to keep her secret. When it was himself he wished to satisfy, he was faithful to nature; but when his patron's vanity was at stake, as well as Denner's own reputation as a portraitist, he was willing to commit a distortion of the facts.

The eighteenth century saw a tremendous expansion in the realm of scientific investigation. That interest which had erupted in the sixteenth century and was nurtured throughout the seventeenth now began to bloom in earnest. Many of the fields of investigation harked back to the observations of the ancients, and scientists picked up on studies which had lain dormant for centuries. One of these areas of study, today regarded as a pseudo-science, was physiognomy. Renewed interest in this subject had emerged in the Renaissance. Dozens of treatises on physiognomy appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the seventeenth century, a distinction came to be made between pathognomy, the study of the features as they are distorted by strong emotions such as pain or mirth, and physiognomy which concerned itself with the features at rest. Physiognomy, in this narrow sense, examined anatomical variations in the structure of the skull, the types of noses and chins, the relative distance between
the eyes, and the like. Some physiognomists went so far as to discourse on curly, straight, sparse, thick, blonde and dark hair. 37

Physiognomy as conceived by its practitioners was the science of discovering the interior character of the man through the observation of his exterior appearance. 38 The interest in this science was widespread, with studies published in England, Italy, France, Switzerland, and Germany. 39 There was even a treatise published in Hamburg in 1714, by Johann Heinrich Praetorius, called Breviarium Physiognomicum. 40 One went about the study of physiognomy by observing paintings by master artists and fixing one's own observations of fellow men by making sketches. By this means, the student sharpened his eyes to the fine distinctions of features from one face to another, and combined his personal observations with those made by the great writers on the subject.

Denner made an astonishing number of drawings of the head of his wife. I have seen about fifty such sheets and doubtlessly many more exist. 41 Drawn in sanguine, charcoal, or pencil, each study records the head of Esther from a slightly different angle, ranging from frontal to pure profile (fig. 58c, d). In a few of them, she is sleeping, in others, her head is tilted to the side. The subtlest nuances of planes and the different curves and angles of the features are carefully distinguished in every case. None of these drawings shows her with even the slightest trace of momentary expression. She always wears the same impassive look, her features relaxed in their habitual set. I do not regard this enormous group of
drawings as simply a testimonial of Denner's love for his wife. Instead they seem to constitute a systematic process of physiognomical study. Where but in this serial examination of a single head, can be found so complete a record of physiognomical method? With great discipline, he repeatedly forces his eye and hand to capture the accurate outlines of the head from every angle. If Denner himself expected no revelation of Esther's invisible spirit by diligently examining her features, if he was less interested in discovering a relationship between the exterior and interior than an avowed physiognomist might be, he nonetheless provided the student of this science with ideal fodder for such an investigation.

John Caspar Lavater was a clergyman in Zurich who had studied under Bodmer and Breitinger. In 1787 he published an enormous collection of fragments toward a codification of the science of physiognomy. Unsystematic as this work may be, it does include a good deal of material on the recent history of physiognomy and presents the prevailing attitudes of the science in the eighteenth century. Incorporating with his own clerical bias certain vestiges of the theories of Bodmer and Breitinger, as well as a strain of pietism, Lavater's writings, although after the fact, seem to have a strong bearing on Denner's heads. Lavater's fundamental justification of art reflects his characteristic synthesis of the above-mentioned notions: "To imitate the work of God, were it only superficially and in a single point, is the noblest attempt and attainment of man."
In Essays on the Science of Physiognomy, Lavater mentions Balthasar Denner's head studies. The reader should be warned before reading the passages I quote that Lavater tended to wax rhapsodic over Raphael, and often lapsed into art criticism, forgetting to relate some of the paintings he discusses to the ostensible purpose of his study. What follows is a passage which comes within a discussion of several artists who are of particular importance to the study of physiognomy:

When near it is as exact as possible and possesses an accuracy that will stand the feverish examination. At a distance, the whole no longer produces any effect, or at least the effect is prodigiously weakened. (This is the case with the two beautiful heads by Denner to be seen in the gallery at Mannheim.)

Later in the same volume he writes:

The heads of Denner would be invaluable for the study of physiognomy if his microscopic details corresponded better to the spirit of the whole.

Perhaps it would be misleading to suggest that Denner was bent "on forming a judgement of man's morals and secret affections," in the words of Scipio Claramontius, Lavater's favorite German physiognomist. Yet there seems to be a strong affinity between the 'Porendenner' and the methods, perhaps even the aims, of the physiognomists. The fact that Denner chose to paint these old models who bore the marks of their characters in the very creases and distortions caused by the years is significant in itself. As Max Friedländer remarked about a van Eyck portrait, "The hieroglyphs which life and fate have engraved on the face are read off." We should not try to make Denner a physiognomist in quite the elaborate and formal sense that the treatise writers were. But we nonetheless can find a true and
deeply personal interpretation of physiognomy in the 'Poren­
denner.'

Another aspect of science which may have touched Denner's
career is optics. There appear certain distortions in some of
Denner's paintings which are possibly the result of his use of
the camera obscura. Much discussion has been raised with re­
gard to Vermeer's possible use of such a device in the seven­
teenth century. The evidence, presented mainly in the form
of reconstructions of the effects of various models of such
apparatus as would have been available in his time, are highly
convincing.\(^49\) Later in the seventeenth century and in the
early eighteenth, camera obscuras of a much greater sophisti­
cation had been devised. The bi-convex, and even combination
tele-lenses already in use by the late seventeenth century were
capable of eliminating the most obvious distortions, such as
light halation and the prominent circles of confusion that were
evident in Vermeer's painting.\(^50\) In some of Denner's paintings
there is an odd variation in the relative sharpness of focus
of various parts of the composition. There are certain other
peculiar distortions to be considered below which also suggest
the use of a lens. In fact, it is very difficult to under­
stand how Denner could have seen such phenomena if not through
some kind of optical device. My arguments rest on empirical
and circumstantial evidence, however, because no record of
Denner's use of a camera obscura seems to exist.

Not all of Denner's paintings exhibit optical distortions
which might result from the use of a lens. Some of the 'Poren­
denner' do, however, as well as two still lifes in Hamburg.
In the fruit piece (fig. 57) discussed above, for example, only the immediate foreground objects are clearly in focus. These include the grape leaf, the vine tendrils and the foremost grapes. The objects behind these quickly become fuzzy, as though a thick misty atmosphere were eroding their contours. The difference in the distinctness with which objects are drawn can be seen even within such a small cross-section of depth as the bunch of grapes. Those at the tip of the bunch, therefore closest to the viewer, are sharply drawn, while those just a few inches behind are already somewhat blurred. The fruits in the basket are extremely fuzzy although they could not be more distant from the grapes than about a foot. Note the clarity of the vine tendril which hangs over the ledge, compared with the indistinctness of the stem of the apple, for example (fig. 60). A similar effect is evident in the plum in the right foreground as opposed to the plum in the basket. This effect seems to be independent of the factor of illumination, for there are fruits in the background which are picked out by the light yet are indistinct in contour and texture. Since the distance between foreground and background elements in this picture cannot be very large, the relative distinctions in focus between near and far objects seems at the very least to be hypersensitive. The situation is not comparable to aerial perspective in a landscape, in which a great distance is involved in the spatial recession; there the objects lose distinctness in miles, not inches. What might be responsible for this effect is the phenomenon of optics called depth of field. This term describes the cross-section of depth which
is in focus through a lens in a view to infinity—that is, the extent of a scene from near to far, which will be sharp in a photograph, or in this case thrown on a drawing screen. A picture by Ben Schonzeit (fig. 61) provides a dramatic illustration of the exploitation of this effect in contemporary painting. If Denner did indeed paint this still life with the aid of a lens, it was capable of resolving, from this close distance, only the relatively small field of the foreground. The rest of the picture is out of focus. An important factor to keep in mind here is that the closer the lens is to the object, the less the depth of field. In this case, the hypothetical lens must have been very near the table, for the depth of field is quite small.

Another odd feature in this painting is the seemingly arbitrary way in which the composition is truncated on the sides. It is possible that the perimeters of the composition could have been dictated by the limit of the scene as it would be projected on a drawing screen.

Some of the same optical peculiarities appear in a flower piece in Hamburg (fig. 62). Here the depth of field is even smaller, indicating that if a lens was used, it was placed very close to the objects. The extreme foreground and the background elements are fuzzy while the flowers in between are crisply drawn.

In the head studies, when the object to be recorded is very compact and contained between two planes that are close together, optical distortion would be less obvious. There are, however, features in some of the head studies which might be
due to the use of a lens. The most interesting example in this regard is the **Old Man** in Hamburg (fig. 16). We have already seen in the last chapter how blurry this image is compared to other of the 'Porendenner.' However, our concern now lies with how various parts of the picture itself are more or less distinct with reference to each other. While none of the drawing is particularly crisp, the primary frontal plane of the face is distinct enough so that one can clearly make out the outline of the lips, the sharply defined shadow of the nostril, and the wrinkles around the eyes. The eye is also precisely described. Moving further back from the picture plane, however, we find a striking loss in the clarity of forms. The contour of the ear is remarkably soft; the drawing is so indistinct that the arrangement of the flesh and cartilage is impossible to understand. Could this inconsistency in focus reflect the distortion caused by a lens in a camera obscura?

Another distortion that a lens can cause is a flattening of forms and a warping of contours around the perimeter of an image. A small chalk and watercolor portrait drawing, an **Old Man's Head**, in the Hamburg printroom (fig. 63) seems to display such features. While Denner's portrait drawings are usually extremely accurate in outline, and convey a strong illusion of volume and plastic force, this drawing is an exception. The form of the head is curiously flat. Although light and shadow are indicated with careful hatching, the image insists on remaining two-dimensional. It is as though the edges of the image have been pulled out slightly so that just a little bit
more of the head is seen than ought to be the case from this angle. This is especially true of the left side of the face and the crown of the head. It is only a slight distortion and it is not impossible that this model had a peculiarly shaped head. On the other hand, it could also be a common distortion of the plano- or bi-convex lens.

The optical distortions by which a camera obscura might cause problems for a portraitist were noted already in 1755 in a manual for artists published in Paris by Charles-Antoine Jombert. He first discusses how useful such an apparatus is for making small scale portraits. The difficulties, he notes, begin when the model is to be represented life-size. Because he discusses the particular effects of the type of lens that a contemporary artist would most likely have employed for this kind of project, the passage is important enough to quote in full:

De la maniere de représenter les portraits

Il seroit assurément très-curieux & très-utile de pouvoir représenter les visages des hommes au naturel par le moyen de cette machine [camera obscura]. La chose réussit fort bien en petit; & quand parmi les objets qu'on envisage ainsi tracés il se trouve quelque personne de connoissance, on la reconnaît très-distinctement, quand même l'apparence de la personne entière n'occuperoit pas un demi pouce sur le papier. Mais il y a plus de difficultés pour réussir en grand; car quand on représente une tête dans sa grandeur naturelle, on emploie un verre, tel qu'il a été dit pour les estampes, & l'on place le visage dans l'endroit où l'on devoit mettre la Planche. Mais ce visage qui paroit alors assez distinctement pour qu'on puisse reconnoître la personne & pour.satisfaire à la vue, n'a pas d'ailleurs les traits assez marqués pour qu'ils puissent être suivis aussi exactement qu'il le faudroit pour garder la ressemblance. La raison en est, que les traits paroissent vifs & distincts dans la chambre
The application of the camera obscura to art has received a substantial amount of recent attention. What has emerged from this research is that artists availed themselves of this instrument much more extensively than had previously been thought. Charles Seymour remarked, "The experimental use of the device not only for painting, but for portraiture rather than landscape in 1668 is striking." Heinrich Schwarz mentions that "in the eighteenth century, the camera was an almost indispensible part of many artist's equipment." He illustrates his point with a mezzotint portrait of the German painter Joachim Franz Beich (1665-1748) in which a portable camera obscura appears along with his maulstick and crayon. Gernsheim in the History of Photography reports, "By the beginning of the eighteenth century the camera obscura with its various forms had become a craze...as an aid in painting
its use was widespread." He also quotes John Harris who discussed the camera's application to painting in a book published in London in 1704, "Everything is represented with such exquisite exactness as far surpasses the utmost skill of any painter to express." This phrase brings to mind the kinds of accolades bestowed on Denner's Alte Frau when it was on view in London.

Fortunately, Denner has left us at least a few documents which shed some light on the meaning of the head studies. A brief commentary was published in 1920 by Eckart von Sydow on the correspondence between Denner and Herzog Christian von Mecklenberg. Von Sydow also published the roster of pictures to be sold off in a picture lottery held by Denner in Hamburg in August of 1746 (see Appendix). In a letter to the Herzog's secretary, Denner described a collection of heads which he was offering for sale:

Da ich endlich durch viele Mühe und Fleiss ein klein Cabinet von Fünf Köpfen verfertigt worinn man die principalsten Veränderung der Distanzen auch folglich immer mehrere Ausarbeitung wahrnehmen kann, und welches dehm zu folge von den Kennern für Gantz was extraordinaires gehalten wird.

It is likely that this "cabinet of five heads" is the same suite to which reference is made in the introduction--actually a sales pitch--to the list of paintings put up for the lottery in 1746.

Es hat Balthasar Denner durch viele Zeit u. Mühe ein kleines Cabinet in Mahlerey auf Kupfer zum Stande gebracht. Dieses besteht aus fünf (so wohl jungen als alten) Köpfen wodurch die Hauptgrade der Distanzen dargestellt werden, und welche anzeigen wie sich immer mehrere Kleinigkeiten hervorthun, wenn mann sich seinem Gegenstande nähert. Diese Distantzen gehen von ohngefähr drei Fuss bis zu einen, und also zu allernächsten,
welche man nehmen kann. Die Ausarbeitung ist folglich bis aufs höchste getrieben, und gleichet den beyden bekannten Köpfen, so sich von Denners Hand in der Wiener­schen Gallerie befinden.\textsuperscript{62}

Denner moved his family to Braunschweig the following winter. It is likely that the purpose of this lottery was to prune his collection of paintings so that he would not need to transport so many. Most of the works in the roster are by other hands, but a substantial number are Denners which had probably been kept unsold too long in his studio. That is likely the case with the five heads.

We do not know who wrote this Reklame which precedes the lottery roster, but it is likely it was written with close advice of Denner for it agrees in the particulars with the artist's words in his earlier letter. According to the descriptions, Denner has varied the distance from which he painted the heads, and as the interval between artist and model increased, the amount of detail which could be distinguished decreased proportionately. The lottery passage adds the information that the intervals varied between approximately three feet and one foot. The paintings which were executed from the closest vantage point are thus exceedingly refined in detail and are compared to the pictures in the Vienna Gallery. The cabinet of five heads constitutes the "grand prize" of the lottery.

This information raises at least as many questions as it answers. It certainly makes it plain that Denner was highly conscious of the difference in the minute exactitude of execution from one head study to the next. In the case of this
suite of five heads, which has not survived intact, he set up a difficult technical problem which required practiced objectivity of observation in the service of an almost scientifically controlled program. This sheds a good deal of light on the artistic personality of Denner, and is very much in keeping with the other issues discussed in this chapter.

But how much relevance does this have to all the 'Porendenner'? Are the head studies merely a solution to the technical experiment of distance versus detail? The paintings themselves argue against this theory. In the first place, the 'Porendenner' heads are all roughly natural size and their formats are closely comparable in dimensions. To convey distance accurately the heads would have needed to diminish in size as the interval between artist and model increased. They would have become smaller while a proportionately larger amount of the bust would have become visible. The 'Porendenner' do not conform to such a pattern. They vary in precision of detail, but not in size, distance from the picture plane, or in the portion of the bust included in the composition. The reader who has been especially attentive to my arguments for the use of a camera obscura will probably raise an objection here; with the aid of such an optical device that could be focused independently, without regard to natural scale, such a problem could have been resolved. However, it must be remembered that by no means do all of the 'Porendenner' exhibit distortions which suggest the use of a lens. Therefore this solution would not embrace the 'Porendenner' as a group.
What seems more likely is that Denner had become conscious of this technical problem of recording objects seen from various distances through his experiences in painting the 'Porendenner' and possibly also through experiments with a camera obscura. The cabinet of five heads is a formal, didactic, and virtuoso explication of this technical problem. To some extent it reflects on the 'Porendenner' to know this was a conscious concern of the artist, but it hardly provides them with a complete raison d'Être.

If Denner was merely posing this technical problem for himself, would not a half dozen of the skillfully worked 'Porendenner' from the twenties have sufficed for the solution? Why did the models need to be old people? Would not a series of pictures of the same model have been a more effective means of solving this problem? Was Denner merely producing Wunderstück for Wunderkammern? Until some new evidence comes to light which yields more insight into the artist's motives, it is best to regard the 'Porendenner' as surprisingly complex works of art.
CHAPTER IV

QUESTIONABLE ATTRIBUTIONS

Denner's oeuvre offers a challenge to the connoisseur for a number of reasons. He was an exceptionally prolific artist with a career that spanned four decades, and he did not always oblige us by signing his works. As we have already seen, Denner was given to experimentation with different manners of handling paint. Several replicas of Denner's compositions exist, some are autograph, others not. Furthermore, Denner had a skillful imitator who confounds connoisseurs with his head studies executed in a technique which is comparable to that of the 'Porendenner.'

This imitator was Christian Seybold, who was born in Mainz ca. 1700 and died in 1768 in Vienna.¹ Little is known about his life except that he was autodidact, a portraitist by profession, and in 1749 he became Kammermaler to the Kaiser.² No personal contact is recorded between Denner and Seybold; the implication is that none occurred. Seybold was fond of making self-portraits. Some of these are haughty and romanticized images like the one in Dresden. Others are painted in an exacting pseudo-'Porendenner' technique, such as the picture in the Corsini Gallery (fig. 64). Here the artist is portrayed in a short bust-length turned three-quarters
to the left. His face is exceedingly close to the picture plane. A strong even light shines on the sitter from the right. The drapery of the painter's cap, jacket and shirt are restlessly active. Bold irregular brushstrokes, complicated patterns of folds, and strong contrasts of light and shadow all contribute to the effect of incessant agitation. This nervous flutter and general fussiness around the head are hallmarks of Seybold's style. The face is a remarkable feat of painting. It seems as if Seybold were observing his image in a magnifying mirror. The surface of the skin is duplicated in excruciatingly minute detail, and the drawing is crisp throughout. Wrinkles seem as if they were incised with a pen. Between the eyebrows and around the nostrils, the epidermis is pitted with deep pores that are much more emphatically described than even in the Uffizi Denner (fig. 15). Every hair of the eyebrow is picked out individually, as is every whisker.

There are several stylistic idiosyncrasies apparent in the Corsini Self-Portrait which will prove helpful in recognizing Seybold's hand. First, he uses a fine hatching in certain areas to model forms. This rather graphic mannerism is best seen in the lower right corner of his left eye, where minute, closely spaced lines are laid down more or less parallel to each other. Careful scrutiny reveals an overlay of even finer stripes in the lower eye socket. Short white strokes which are almost mechanically repetitious cover the lower edge of the lower lip. Another quirk of Seybold's style is his way of drawing eyes. The curve of the lower lid
is interrupted with exaggerated abruptness at the tear duct so that the inner corner of the eye seems peculiarly elongated. The shape resembles an elongated lemon. An unnatural hardness, like opaque glass, characterizes the surface of the eyeballs themselves.

Certainly this self-portrait could not be confused with Denner's works, but Seybold's head studies of old men and women present a more difficult problem. Some of these have been mistaken for Denners in the past, and I propose here to reconsider two others. First, in order to establish a sound basis for comparison, we will briefly examine four head studies which have traditionally been assigned to Seybold. ³

A pendant pair by Seybold, an Old Man with a Spotted Fur Cap ⁴ (fig. 65) and an Old Woman with a Green Headscarf (fig. 66), was acquired by Dresden in 1753. These portraits are painted on copper with dimensions similar to the 'Porendenner.' The figures are portrayed bust-length and are lighted from the right. While the busts themselves are seen nearly frontal, the heads are turned slightly toward each other. Dressed in his cuirass, open-necked shirt, and fur hat and cape, the man is characterized as a spirited old soldier. The treatment of his skin is, if anything, harsher than in the Corsini picture with sharply etched wrinkles and an epidermis riddled with prominent pores. White hatching makes an appearance again on the outlines of his lips. Noteworthy here is the rendering of the loose sagging flesh of the neck. In response to the twist of the head, the skin bunches up in rolls. The throat is covered with a peculiar pattern of scales which
evokes the texture of parched skin toughened by years of exposure. Elsewhere in the neck appear striations in light paint.

The model in the Old Woman pendant is dressed in fur with very long pile, and a satiny green headscarf. In the center of her forehead and at the left temple we can see the gauzy bonnet she wears over her hair. The light dancing on the complicated ripples of drapery creates a great deal of fluttering activity around her face. In the area above the inner corner of the left eye, just beneath the eyebrow appear Seybold's parallel hatching strokes. We must look even more carefully to see the striations in the highlights of the drapery, especially by the left ear, beside the right eye and on the left shoulder. The elongation of the inner corner of the eye is typical of this artist, as is the glassiness of the eyeball itself. The sense of pressure that the eyeball exerts on the lid is pronounced, accentuating the collapsed, slack skin in the rest of the eye socket. Seybold again is careful to depict the signs of age in the neck, both in the texture of the surface and the way in which the jowls merge directly into the neck without interruption by the jawline.

Another Portrait of a Woman by Seybold (fig. 67) which appeared in the trade in Hannover\(^5\) conforms very closely to the 'Porendenner' type. A female portrait by Denner in Tours (fig. 31) exhibits an identical headdress and a very similar pose as does Denner's Old Woman in Stockholm (fig. 29). The Hannover sitter is lighted from the right, but the illumination is more uniform than in the 'Porendenner,' falling with almost equal intensity throughout the picture. Compared to the drapery
of Denner's Stockholm Old Woman, for example, Seybold's fabrics are much more restlessly agitated. On the whole, there is a harder, almost wooden treatment of surfaces in the Seybold picture that is essentially different from Denner's more pliable flesh textures. Another Seybold painting (whereabouts unknown),\(^6\) supposedly of the artist's wife, exhibits most of the same features we have already discussed with regard to his other works. It might merely be noted that it contains an especially good example of the way in which Seybold makes the transition directly from jowl to neck, emphasizing the hollow on the underside of the chin.

A Portrait of an Old Woman (fig. 40) attributed to Denner was sold in Berlin in 1915.\(^7\) The sitter is represented bust-length turned three-quarters to the left. Part of her hand is visible as her fingers are entwined with the beads of her necklace. Her headdress is an ornate version of that in Seybold's Dresden portrait, here made of decorated lace instead of plain gauze. She wears a mantle with a fur border and her chemise is trimmed with a ruffle of intricately patterned lace. The busy combination of the rippling draperies, lace ruffle and pearls which competes with the face for the viewer's attention might well be expected from Seybold, but not from Denner. This sitter bears a tantalizingly close facial resemblance to the model in Seybold's Dresden Old Woman (fig. 66) as well as in another female portrait (location unknown) mentioned above. The over-arched eyelid, the thick prominent nose, the configuration of wrinkles in the brow and the pouting lower lip are common to all three sitters. Also
similar is the way the cheek is transformed into jowl and neck without interference from underlying bone structure. Little can be discerned about the surface treatment from the poor quality photograph, but we can nonetheless sense the drier, rather more harsh handling, and the hardness of form. We have had cause to mention how in the 'Porendenner' the nuances of the relationship of internal anatomical structure to external coverings are so sensitively rendered. Denner seems to involve a deeper layer of flesh, making the surface more pliable and organically responsive. Seybold concentrates exclusively on clarity of surface effects with an almost clinical detachment. The Berlin painting is much more compatible with Seybold in this regard. Both in overall appearance and the details of drawing, this painting corresponds so closely to Seybold's head studies that I believe it can be reassigned to him with a good measure of confidence.

A much more difficult problem of attribution confronts us with a Portrait of a Man in Oberlin (fig. 38). It has been given to Denner, and indeed it bears a significant resemblance to the 'Porendenner.' However, it exhibits enough anomalous features to raise a serious question as to the validity of this attribution. The bust portrait is painted on panel, an unusual, but not unique, support for a 'Porendenner.' While the bust is parallel to the picture plane, the head is turned three-quarters to the right. Seldom, if ever, did Denner portray the bust frontally, but in his Dresden pendants, we have seen Seybold employ such a pose. The elderly model in the Oberlin picture rests his hands on the head of a cane in much
the same fashion as is found in Rembrandt's Portrait of the Artist's Mother in Vienna, or in Denner's Old Woman in Hamburg (fig. 17). His hands are compact with short stubby fingers. While the same is true for the hands in the Hamburg Kitchenmaid (fig. 58), those in the Hamburg Old Woman and in the East Berlin Portrait of a Man (fig. 1) are much more shapely, tapered and elongated. The Oberlin hands are quite close to those of the Berlin female portrait, re-attributed to Seybold above (fig. 40). What is most remarkable about the Oberlin hands is neither their small square shape nor their dirty fingernails with overgrown cuticles; it is rather the strange and disturbing way in which their surface is described. Long stripes of white and pink are juxtaposed, traversing the width of the backs of the hands and breaking into rippling patterns across the knuckles. On the fingers themselves is a similar array of thin parallel strokes. Nowhere else in Denner's works can be found the use of striations to model form and describe textures. It seems to be an imitation of pastel technique in paint, yet more significantly, it reminds us of Seybold's thinner, but similar striations on the throat of the Dresden Old Man (fig. 65). Upon close scrutiny, it becomes evident that much of the Oberlin composition is modeled with hatching and striations, although the stripes are slightly finer than those in the hands. The neck is covered with rows of undulating lines which echo the protuberances and depressions of the slack flesh over the tendons. Although the signs of old age are often most eloquent in the neck, Denner's treatment of this region in the 'Porendenner' tends to be summary. On the other
hand, Seybold appears to be fascinated with the "topography" of the neck. An outstanding example of Seybold's interest in the throat is provided by the Dresden Old Man, but it is also evident in others of his head studies.

Plainly visible on the lower lip of the Oberlin model is the same kind of parallel hatching we have had cause to mention so frequently in conjunction with Seybold. Only once, in Denner's ex-Schwerin Old Man (fig. 27) does such hatching appear, and there it is not so systematically repetitious as that in the Oberlin portrait. There are long thin stripes of white paint which follow the curve of the eyelid of the Oberlin model, as well as short hatching strokes above the inner corner of the right eye. Although these lines are thicker, they nonetheless resemble those above the corner of the right eye in Seybold's Old Woman in Dresden (fig. 66). We find a linear pattern in the Oberlin portrait which fans out in rays from the outer corner of the right eye and turns towards the nose as it models the area directly below the eyes. An analogous, though more minute, pattern surrounds the right eye of Seybold's Corsini portrait (fig. 64), but no such arrangement appears in any of Denner's other works.

While the hair in the Oberlin portrait is extremely close to that in the Seybold Old Woman in Dresden, it is not nearly so soft and cloud-like as in Denner's Old Men in the Braunschweig (fig. 3); Vienna (fig. 33); or ex-Schwerin (fig. 27) paintings. The eyes are even more difficult to reconcile with the attribution to Denner. They are of that emphatically arched lemon shape with unnaturally extended inner corners.
Denner did not draw his eyes that way in any of his head studies, but the eyes in the Seybold portraits are of an analogous design. Nor is the surface quality of the eyeball like Denner's customary treatment in which the sclera is matte while only the white flecks of impasto in the light reflections convey the moist transparency of the cornea. In the Oberlin picture, the sclera is opaque, but with a surface sheen like a cultured pearl. They are very close to the hard luminosity of the eyes in Seybold's *Old Man* in Dresden.

We cannot ignore the fact that there are also features in the Oberlin portrait which argue against an attribution to Seybold. A slightly softer atmosphere seems to cling to the surfaces of the Oberlin portrait which is closer to Denner than to the icy sharpness of focus in Seybold's head studies. Seybold, as well as Denner, normally took great pains to disguise his brushwork in the rendering of flesh, but here the path of the brush is clearly discernible, even emphasized. In the Oberlin portrait, the means tend to call attention to themselves. The striations are not merely visible, they are arresting. One has to search for the fine hatchings in Seybold's pictures, and such brushwork would be out of place in the 'Porendenner.' But, because it is executed in such exacting detail, and the character of that detail itself speaks against Denner's hand, I think we must look elsewhere for the creator of this portrait. It is tempting to postulate that this might be an early work by Seybold, but that suggestion brings us into a realm of pure speculation for nothing is known about this painter's stylistic development. Nevertheless, the likelihood
that the Oberlin Portrait of a Man is a work by Christian Seybold is great enough to justify at least a tentative re-attribution.

In the Indianapolis Museum is another Portrait of an Old Man (fig. 37) attributed to Denner. It provides one good illustration of how bust-length portraits of elderly models—and this sitter does not even seem so old—have been carelessly ascribed to Denner. Altogether devoid of volume and mass, this image is the product of a very uncertain hand. The drawing is so halting and hesitant that the contours ripple as though distorted in the reflection of a carnival mirror. There is nothing beyond the subject and format which is even vaguely akin to Denner.

Two female portrait heads in Braunschweig have long been attributed to Denner. They are rather problematic because they do not conform to the handling of the other head studies by Denner. Although they entered the collection together in the late eighteenth century,8 the two are not much alike. The first is a Portrait of a Woman (fig. 5) presented bust-length turned three-quarters to the right. An extraordinary fluidity in the brushwork both in the face and garments makes this a curious picture for Denner. But unlike the case of the Oberlin portrait, we do find analogies for this type of handling in others of Denner's works. There is, in fact, a larger conventional Portrait of an Unknown Man by Denner in Hamburg (fig. 69) which is rendered with a very similar broad liquid brush. There are passages in the Braunschweig picture, such as in the collar, which are very like the creamy strokes made
with a heavily loaded brush in the garments of the Hamburg sitter. Also similar is the suggestive shorthand drawing of the lips. This Braunschweig woman is imbued with a convincing quality of human presence, both in her dreamy expression and by the sheer strength of corporeal volume the artist has managed to convey. Although at first sight one might sense something amiss with the attribution of this picture to Denner, further consideration and comparison with others of his works, tends to assuage those doubts.

The other Braunschweig female portrait (fig. 35) is not nearly so successful an image. Perhaps the dry crumbly texture of the painting would be acceptable as an experimental essay by Denner if, for example, the head of the sitter did not look so flat, and the contours of the chin did not deteriorate into confusion. Certain aspects of the drawing, particularly in the eyes, remind us of the Indianapolis male portrait discussed above; both these images lack in plastic force and are further spoiled by smudged contours. In any case, the weakness of the execution and the lack of conviction in the expression raise serious doubts regarding the attribution of this portrait to Denner.

This is an appropriate moment to introduce the problem of the allegorical and genre portraits of old people which are supposedly by Denner. A number of half-length portraits of this type have appeared in the trade as Denner's, but it is difficult to understand from the reproductions the reason for the attributions. Not only do they not look much like Denner's secure paintings, but they are accompanied by no evidence
in terms of provenance, signature, or documents to substantiate such an attribution. With the sole exception of the Kitchen-maid in Hamburg—which these attributed paintings do not much resemble—I know of no irrefutably autograph genre pictures. I suspect that an early false assignment to Denner of a pendant pair split between Augsburg and Bayreuth is partly to blame for the steady stream of misattributions to Denner of similar half-length genre paintings. In 1937, Rudolf Peltzer persuasively argued that this "Old Woman with a Winebottle" and the "Old Luteplayer" were not by Denner, but rather by Christopher Paudiss. Although I have seen only a small photograph of the Augsburg "Old Woman with a Winebottle," and am not familiar with the appearance of her companion piece, I find the suggestion of Paudiss entirely plausible. Furthermore, the Augsburg picture looks so much like the various trade pictures referred to above that its attribution could well have been the source of much confusion. Not that this means all of these pictures should suddenly be reassigned to Paudiss, but this situation does shed light on the problem of why so many genre pictures have been falsely ascribed to Denner. These circumstances might be helpful in understanding reasons for the attribution to Denner of an allegorical portrait in the Wadsworth Atheneum called "Fate" (fig. 36). This half-length type is in some ways similar to the Augsburg picture, although it hardly resembles Paudiss's handling. It represents a wizened old woman crowned with a branch. She holds three bobbins in one hand and pincers to cut the threads in the other. This weatherbeaten old woman—one is tempted to
call her a hag—is very dryly executed and exhibits some uncertainty in the drawing. Some of this is probably due to surface damage and careless overpainting, but there is nonetheless a lack of technical facility here which is disturbing. The rather thoughtless, schematic handling of the wrinkles in the brow and the tough fibrous quality of surface in the neck is certainly uncharacteristic of Denner. Nor do we expect to find in a Denner the lack of relief in the modeling of the lips and surrounding regions. That Denner was responsible for this "Fate" seems quite unlikely.

A Head of an Old Man attributed by the dealer to "either Balthasar Denner or Giuseppe Nogari" was sold in Warsaw in 1909. Although the dealer gave himself the extra insurance of assigning two names to the picture, he seems to have erred with both choices. The subject is presented in a long bust length and his head is turned three-quarters to the left. Even from the poor quality photograph it is clear that the mood, the slightly off-balance pose, and costume find no analogues in Denner's oeuvre. I do not propose here to discuss Nogari's style except to mention that this canvas bears only a minimal relation to his work. On the other hand this painting is remarkably close to the style of Josef Georg Edlinger. A Tobacco Sniffer by Edlinger in a private collection in Munich portrays a model whose physiognomical resemblance to the Warsaw sitter is obvious. The two paintings share an intense and anxious mood which relates them to the "Sturm und Drang" movement in the literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century. The nervous expression of the
face, the lighting effects, and the implicit motion in the pose also tie the Warsaw painting to Edlinger.

Finally, we examine yet another so-called Denner, a Portrait of a Man in a private collection (fig. 39). The sitter here is portrayed bust-length turned slightly to the right. He wears a black beret and jacket, and has a bushy grey beard. The chiaroscuro in this painting is uncharacteristic of Denner; it looks as though a spotlight were aimed at the left side of the model's face, so that a deep shadow is cast over the right. This model does not appear to be very old. He has just a couple of furrows on his brow and his cheeks are relatively smooth. On the whole, the face is fairly tightly worked, but not with much attention to details of texture in the skin. The lips are so widely parted that the teeth are visible. He gazes off at nothing in particular. This Portrait of a Man does not really look like a Denner head study, but it does bear a striking resemblance to some of Christopher Paudiss' paintings of old men. The Portrait of a Bearded Man in Vienna (fig. 55), for example, is surprisingly similar in the lighting, format and evocative intention. Note especially the soft generalized treatment of the hair and skin, and the parted lips (very common in Paudiss' portraits) which are found in both pictures. While I have not seen this painting in the original, I would nevertheless doubt Denner's authorship and be inclined to suggest Paudiss as a better possibility.

It seems worthwhile to end this chapter with some words of caution. While Denner's secure works may vary in quality,
I do not think they ever betray technical incompetence. But perhaps my standards are set unrealistically high. It must be remembered that this study has concentrated on the most carefully executed and expensive works, the 'Porendenner.' Denner himself attached the highest value to these. Not all of them bear signatures, and it is hardly reasonable to expect Denner to have signed his modest, inexpensive head studies. Nor can we expect that the less ambitious portrait heads of old people will stand up favorably to comparison with the 'Porendenner.' Denner's less spectacular efforts are much more likely either to have been lost, or not associated with his name at all. We simply do not know what a head study which the artist appraised at four Reichsthalar would look like, although we have a good idea of what to expect from a piece priced at three hundred fifty Reichsthalar. From what secure paintings we have, a fair judgment could be formed as to what is an outstanding head study. We can gauge the upper limits of Denner's ability, but we have not sounded the bottom. This leaves a good deal of latitude for errors in connoisseurship, throwing us back on our instincts more than we would like.
In his own times, Balthasar Denner was an enormously successful and famous artist. Today his name is almost forgotten. This chapter, in one sense, concerns itself with reconciling Denner's once great reputation with his present day obscurity. The adulation of Denner's contemporaries, no less than our own forgetfulness, was largely a function of taste; obviously paintings do not change, people's feelings about them do. How the attitudes toward the head studies changed through two centuries is the subject of this chapter.

I have chosen to let the critics speak for themselves. The substance of this chapter is comprised of their statements, and my commentary is minimal. I fear that some of the coherence and flavor of the language of these passages would be lost in translation, and thus have left them in the original tongues.

Although most of the writings deal with the 'Porendenner' alone, the following reactions to one of Denner's formal portraits are too revealing to omit. When Denner's portrait of Barthold Heinrich Brockes was published in an engraved frontispiece to the first edition of the Kindermord in 1715, no less than four poems were written to sing the praise of both the portrayer and the portrayed. A few lines from Michael Richey are representative:
Mein Leser, fragst Du, von wem diess Bild und wessen? Apelles hat gemahlt, Apollo hat gesessen.²

There is little cleverness in the verses of Johann Ulrich König, Gertz or Christian Friedrich Weichmann on this subject.³

They praise the verisimilitude of the portrait, claiming that it is so life-like that the image almost seems capable of Brockes’ speech. It embodies for them, the soul and spirit of Brockes. Later, in 1728, Weichmann writes an elegy to the three sister arts in homage to what he considers to be the peak of Hamburg’s cultural achievement:

Es lebe das vergnügte Drey
Die Dichtkunst, Tonkunst, Mahlerey
Sie finden stetig solche Kenner
Sie finden stetig solche Gönner
Als Brockes, Telemann und Denner.⁴

It must be taken into account that these writers were fellow townsmen and some of them personal friends of Brockes and Denner. As such, their opinions can be construed as fairly typical only of local attitudes.

The reaction to the Vienna Old Woman in Rotterdam and England has already been discussed. But I give here in full Karel van Mander’s reaction to this picture as reported by Johan van Gool:

Karel van Mander maekt, in’t leven van Leonardo Davinci, gewag van een Vrouwenhooft, door dien Kunsteneaer geschildert naer eenen Mona Liza, en waer aen hy al vier jaren gewerkt had, toen het noch op ver na niet voltooit was. Hy voegt ’er by, dat men niets in ’t leven zag, of het vertoonde zich in dit Afbelfel; zynde so natuurlyk, dat zich de oogen in het hoofd scheenen te beweegen, en alles zo schoon en krachtig van coleur, zonder de minste styvigheid, dat het de aenschouwers verrukte: by dit wonderstuk zou men dat van Denner het naest kunnen gelyken.⁵
Although van Gool himself is full of praises for Denner's talents, he interjects a few lines which hint that already there were a few detractors. He says what a shame it is that art lovers and artists are so quick to judge and find weakness in each other without seeing what is praiseworthy. Whether the disparaging opinions had to do with the head studies or the portraits is not specified. In any case, this is the first inkling that the glowing reputation of Denner's art was beginning to dim.

Just a few years later in 1755, Christian von Hagedorn discusses Denner at some length in *Lettre à un Amateur de la Peintre*. He is apparently not affected by the rumblings alluded to by van Gool, for he is full of praise for the fineness of the execution in the head studies. The only negative observation he makes is quite mild; he felt that while the Vienna Old Woman was deserving of the "éloges des connois­seurs" her companion "n'eut pas le même degré de perfection."

The first thoroughly hostile opinions printed about Denner appeared in a prestigious publication in 1762. As the following passage from *Anecdotes of Painting in England* reveals, Horace Walpole was less than delighted with Denner's head studies:

One of those laborious artists whose works surprise rather than please, and who could not be so excellent if they had not more patience than genius, came hither upon encouragement from the king... [his fame] rose very high on his exhibiting the head of an old woman that he brought over with him... in which the grain of the skin the hairs the glassy humour of the eyes were represented with the most exacting minuteness. It gained him more applause than custom, for a man could not execute many works who employed so much time to finish them... (he resolved, however, says
Vertue, to quit this painful practice, and turn to a bolder and less finished style.)

Walpole objects to the Feinmalerei, the painstaking technique which he instead finds painful. It is exactly that which appealed to Denner's contemporaries which Walpole finds almost unspeakably tedious.

The next substantive criticism of Denner's art is made by the physiognomist Lavater in 1789 and has been quoted above. It need only be mentioned that Lavater was basically sympathetic, although he notes that the image loses its effectiveness when viewed from a distance. Johan Gottfried Schadow, an important sculptor and a physiognomist in his own right, makes the following statement about Denner around the turn of the century: "Seit die Zeitum des Albrecht Dürer und Holbein haben wir vielleicht nur den Denner aufzuweiten, der ein deutsche Künstler ist."9

Nagler replied to the reservations of Lavater when he published the following passage in his dictionary of artists in 1836:

Bei Denner ist der höchste Fleiss, die möglichste Vollendung jede kleine Eigentümlichkeit des Gesichts, sogar die Schweisslöcher der Haut sind sichtbar und dennoch, so sehr man den Fleiss des Künstlers in der Nähe bewundert, verlieren seine Bildnisses nicht an Wirkung für die Ferne.10

A note of condescension toward both the adulation of Denner's contemporaries and the collectors who continued to prize the head studies creeps into the writings of Mantz in 1875.11 Mantz quotes an earlier passage from Mariette who seems to feel that verisimilitude is a quality to be spurned,
and indicates that his own contemporaries’ assessments of Denner divided to some extent along class boundaries.

[Denner] a joui, jusqu'à la fin de sa vie d'un grande réputation, et ses tableaux ont continué d'être payés au poids de l'or; mais par qui? par des rois et des hommes riches et puissants, à qui les singularités en imposent, et qui s'amusent volontiers a de semblables minuties.12

While Paul Mantz is not enthralled with the 'Porendenner' either, and once again disparages the naive taste to which the head studies appealed, he is nonetheless the first to seek a kind of motive and meaning in Denner's subjects.

Il faut le dire, au risque de 'étonner le lecteur, Denner avait un idéal. Après avoir peint un roi, un prince, un grand seigneur, il revenait à son rêve. Italien, il aurait cherché la beauté; Hollandais il aurait poursuivi le caractère; mais sa préoccupation était ailleurs; par un choix singulier, il aurait voué son pinceau à la représentation de la vieillesse, non de cette vieillesse héroïque où le poète salue le soir d'un beau jour, mais de cette déchéance vulgaire qui s'appelle la décrépitude et qui accumule sur un masque amaigri les rides, les taches, les meurtrissures du combat. C'est dans ce goût, si le mot goût avait ici une signification, que Denner avait compris la Tête de Velle Femme qu'il emportait avec lui en Angleterre...

De pareilles œuvres intéressant comme peuvent la faire les efforts d'une volonté ordemment appliquée à un travail mécanique; elles sont en dehors de notre art, et de tous les art. Sous cette reserve, le portrait de femme du musée du Louvre (fig. 21) est un morceau les plus singuliers de Denner. Le coloris en est fort désagréable, et l'exécution est irritant au possible. Nous n'y voyons que le résultat curieux d'un patience que rien ne lasse.13

In their ambitious Geschichte der Malerei of 1888, Woltmann and Woermann begin a refrain which becomes much more audible in the criticism of the 1920's.14 Here it is not yet much more than a regretful overtone which implies that Denner wasted himself on these time-consuming pendantic efforts. There is also a distinction made here between the cold strict
Dass er die Natur mit eigenen Augen angesehen hat, kann man nicht leugnen; freilich aber muss man hinzufügen, dass er sich leider einzureden fuchte, seine Augen seien mit einem Vergrößerungsglase bewassnet. Keine Falte, kein Flecken, kein Härrchen der Haut entgeht ihm; und mit peinlicher sorgfalt giebt er Alles wieder, was ein auf's Ganze, besonders auf den geistigen Gesammtdruck gerichten Blick nicht zu bemerken pflegt. Hat er die Menschen welche ihm sitzen, a zugleich in glasig-kalter Farbe gesehen, was gar nicht selten der Fall ist, so machen seine derartigen Bildnisse für einen gelauterten Geschmack einer geradazu peinlichen Eindruck. Ihre "Virtuositä" aber wird man stets anerkennen; und es muss auch anerkennt werden, dass er manchmal freiere, schlichtere Bildnisse von wirklicher Kraft des Ausdrucks gemalt hat, ja dass ihm auch innerhalb seines eigenen Stils, besonders wenn er einen warmen, leuchtenden Gesammtton mit ihm zu verbinden weiss, manchmal doch ein guter Wurf gelingt, der uns wirklich Bewunderung entlokt. Ein sehr charakteristisches Beispiel seiner kälteren Ausführung bis zum Aeussersten ist seine "älte Frau" von 1721 in Wien; ein vortreffliches Beispiel seiner wärmeren anziehenderen Behandlung bei ähnlicher Ausführlichkeit sein "alter Mann" von 1726 in derselben Sammlung.15

Denner's virtuosity has come to be held against him as an indication of shallowness. We can imagine the surprise of Denner and Hagedorn if they were to find that the less tightly finished Old Man in Vienna was to be admired over his more meticulously executed companion.

Janitschek in 1889 makes several observations which escaped his predecessors' notice.16 He relates the influence of Rembrandt to Denner, carefully distinguishing between imitation and the taking of inspiration. He expresses qualified appreciation for the near-sighted variety of observation found in the 'Porendenner.' But the pictures do not come up to his standard; they are curiosities and not works of art because the spirit of the sitter is suffocated in the detail.

Alfred Lichtwark in Das Bildnis in Hamburg of 1898, includes a long and perceptive chapter about Denner. He is first to take a retrospective look at Denner's critical fortune, concluding that the 'Porendenner' (as well as the formal portraits) were much admired in their time and then afterwards condemned just as extravagantly. His own description of the 'Porendenner' is sensitive and provocative.

Lichtwark manifests little of the condescension of his critical predecessors when he writes:

In ihnen [the Porendenner] seine Leistung als Techniker, und soweit geduldige Technik in Betracht kommt, auch ein Zweig der Malerei überhaupt, und sie werden wohl auch die innerste Neigung der Seele Denners offengebaren.\(^{20}\)

Thus, Lichtwark sees the 'Porendenner' as a culmination of the tradition of Feinmalerei and as a personal and deeply felt statement by the artist.\(^{21}\)

In the late 1920's we have what might be called a wave of negative reaction to Denner's painting. Between 1928 and 1930, Paul Schmidt,\(^{22}\) Max Osborn,\(^{23}\) and V. C. Habicht\(^{24}\) all published books on various aspects of German art history which contain highly unfavorable criticism. The attacks are multi-pronged. One issue is the empty pedantic virtuosity of the paintings themselves. Another is a disgust for the misguided impulse of early eighteenth century taste which found much to admire in these works. The bourgeois culture of the eighteenth century itself is indicted for leading this potentially talented artist astray with its superficial values. Yet another target is the hopeless insensitivity, both past and present, of the general public which has been and will eternally be, full of admiration for all the wrong kinds of art.

Paul Schmidt lumps Denner with Justus Juncker, a still life painter who depended upon Dutch seventeenth century examples. He has nothing favorable to say about Juncker, or about Denner:

Seine Genauigkeit in der Wiedergabe der Natur hat die misverstandene Art die holländer durch glassige
Kleinlichkeit zu überbieten, mit Balthasar Denner gemein und zeigt Juncker als einen Haupttyp jener muffsigen Spiessers, die dem Vorbild das Rausperrn und Spucken abfahren... 25

Kann etwas noch unleidlicher sein als diese ungewollte Parodie des herrenbarocks (referring to Joannes Kupezky) so wäre Balthasar Denner's Seifenschönheit an der Reihe. Kein schlagenderer Beweis für das Niveau der bürgerlichen Kultur Deutschlands im 18. Jahrhunderts als der schallende Ruhm und die ausgedehnte Beschäftigung dieses peinlichen Zeitgenossen, der Falten und Bartstoppeln für das einzig Wichtige am Menschen ansah und sich damit gar noch auf die holländer einer grösseren Zeit hinausredete...(a discussion of the excellence and promise of the youthful apple still life in Hamburg intervenes) Seine berühmte Köpfe sind im besten Falle langweilig, im schlechtesten aber nichts weiter als Zeugnisse, dass unter Philistern auch ein echter Künstler zum unerträglichen Spiesser werden kann. 26

Thus the little water color that Denner made when he was fourteen is set up as a kind of symbol of the excellence the artist would have attained had he not been impeded, even corrupted, by living amidst a defective culture.

Max Osborn in the next year is also full of praise for that apple still life. He complains that the naturalism of the 'Porendenner' is overdone. His attitude toward those who would be so naive as to enjoy these paintings is one of condescension that approaches contempt.

One might suspect, in fact, that Osborn has spent more time studying the opinion of Jantischek (see above) than in studying the paintings themselves.

Habicht has the good sense to realize that his own admiration, as well as that of his colleagues, for the apple still life stems from a projection of modern notions of pictorial space onto a work to which such concepts were quite irrelevant. But he nonetheless sees this water color with its directness and naive strength as a promise that Denner failed to redeem. Habicht expresses little confidence in the judgment of the public:

Es ist töricht, über diese Bewunderung zu lächeln, denn die Allgemeinheit hat fast nie etwas anderes als "Bravour" beklatscht—und tut es in unserer Zeit in noch weit geistloser und beschämender Weise wie damals—nur auf anderen Gebieten.

Elsewhere, Habicht labels Denner a "respectable average painter.' As for Denner's technique in the head studies, he grudgingly issues the following carefully qualified praise:

Wir wollen Denner nicht überschätzen, nur feststellen, dass seine schliesslich auf die minutiöse Darstellung der Köpfe, sei es in Bildnissen, sei es in Phantasieköpfen eingeschränkte Malweise zu einer erstaunlichen Sicherheit und Handfertigkeit geführt hat.

The last opinions we shall consider are those of Hans Konrad Röthel who in 1938 wrote a book entitled Bürgerliche Kultur und Bildnismalerei während der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts. In the first part of this study Röthel deals with the intellectual and cultural life of the town. The second part attempts to demonstrate how Denner's portraits embodied the spirit of Hamburg's bürgerlich Kultur. As the title might suggest, Röthel's methodology derives from the
writings of Riegl and Dvorák. His book is loaded with the familiar jargon of Geistesgeschichte. Although his case is overstated, he does make some valid points about the reciprocity of Denner's portraiture with the emerging bürgerlich system of values. This is not, however, the time for a review of Röthel's book; these preceding remarks ought to clarify the vantage point from which he chooses to see Denner's art. The subject of the 'Porendenner,' in fact, is relegated to a long footnote.³¹

Röthel begins by insisting that the head studies cannot be called portraits. They are to be seen as genre pictures. This assertion is curiously followed by an explanation of the pictures as symbolic of "old age."

Hier wird der Mensch nicht als Individuum und um seiner selbst willen--nicht als ein bestimmter Mensch in seinem Alter--dargestellt, sondern hier wird das Alter als ein allgemein menschlicher, überindividueller Zustand zum Gegenstand der Darstellung gemacht. Dazu kommt, dass die Gesichtszüge des Alters bei diesen Bildnissen nicht als Summe einer Lebenserfahrung aufgefasst werden, sondern als willkommene Modell für eine brillante Virtuosenleistung.³²

This is confusing, but then Röthel has already labeled Denner as an eclectic.³³ First the 'Porendenner' are genre pictures, then symbolic pictures of "old age" and then they are simply virtuoso performances in which the model has meaning only as a physical object. In the last few lines he asserts that they are nothing more than solutions to the technical problems of distance relative to clarity of detail. He believes that with such a technical purpose in mind, no "artistic development" can be assumed since the pictures are merely the results of
experiments. According to Röthel, then, we can neither gauge stylistic development nor attempt to derive a chronology.

...Dass diese Bravourstücke eines imitativen Naturalismus typische Produkte einer eklektizistischen Kunst sind; Zugrunde liegt ein von ausserkünstlerischen Faktoren bedingtes Auswahlprinzip welches nicht einem freischöpferischen Kunstwollen entspringt, sondern das sich nach dem jeweils erwünschten "gOlt" richtet. Die Folge ist, dass die verschiedenen Manieren--und es sind eben Manieren und Manifestationen einer persönlichen Entwicklungsphase--in einem zeitlichen Nebeneinander angetroffen werden, was Übrigens auch die Datierung der "Porendenner" ganz klar ergibt... (He cites here the preface to the lottery register) Damit stellt denner die alten Köpfe eindeutig in den Dienst eines technischen Problems, und von hier wird noch einmal Unmöglichkeit einer schrankenlosen Anwendung der "kunstgeschichtlichen Grundbegriffe" auf das 18. Jahrhundert erwiesen.34

This is the temptingly tidy solution I have felt it necessary to reject; the applicability of the contingencies of distance cannot be assumed for all of the 'Porendenner,' and possibly for none of the head studies beyond the five referred to in the document. It is strange that Röthel, who is so given to complex theories dealing with the interpenetrations of various phenomena in Hamburg culture, would dismiss the 'Porendenner' with such paradoxical oversimplification. On the one hand, they are genre, symbol, and demonstrations of skill. Yet on the other hand they are nothing more than solutions to technical problems. Röthel never resolves this confusing conflict.

Today I think we can be more sympathetic to Denner's achievements. Many of the writers quoted here used Denner's "virtuosity" as an accusation against him. We are not so prone to feel that way. We do not think the less of Terborch because of his "virtuosity" in the painting of satiny fabrics;
on the contrary, we admire such technical skill. Nor do we automatically find fault with a portrait because of a lack of "expression." Looking at the realist and photo-realist paintings so popular today, we are not likely to disparage that primitive instinct in all of us which responds with pleasure to the verism of an image. Consider the paintings of Chuck Close, near-sighted views of ordinary looking models with every pore, wart, and wrinkle meticulously recorded. Is the impulse that prompts him to make these portraits so very distant from that which moved Denner two centuries ago?
CATALOGUE OF THE HEAD STUDIES

PART 1

ACCEPTED WORKS

No. 1 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

copper, 86 x 65 cm.

signed right: Denner fecit 1720

East Berlin, Staatliches Museen,


Replicas: See Cat. no. 22. A variant of this composition is in Sarasota, Ringling Museum.

No. 2 PORTRAIT OF A MAN

copper, 38 x 30 cm.

signed right: Denner fect

Berlin, Dahlem, no. 1014

Replicas: Barcelona, Private Collection, signed in Block letters: B. Denner. (That this copy is autograph is unlikely.)

No. 3 PORTRAIT HEAD OF AN OLD MAN

copper, 37 x 32 cm.

signed lower left: Denner fect

Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, no. 595
Recorded in a Braunschweig inventory in 1738.

Not pendant to Braunschweig no. 596
(Cat. no. 4, below) as stated in
Braunschweig, Verzeichnis, 1969, p. 49.

No. 4 PORTRAIT HEAD OF AN OLD WOMAN Fig. 4

copper, 37 x 32 cm.

signed lower left: Denner fect

Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, no. 596

Recorded in a Braunschweig inventory in 1738.

Not pendant to Braunschweig no. 595
(Cat. no. 3, above) as stated in
Braunschweig, Verzeichnis, 1969, p. 49.

No. 5 PORTRAIT OF A MAN Fig. 5

canvas, 75 x 63 cm.

Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, no. 597

Recorded in a Braunschweig inventory in 1776.

Literature: Biermann, I, no. 170.

No. 6 PORTRAIT HEAD OF A WOMAN Fig. 6

canvas, 42 x 34 cm.

Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, no. 599

Recorded in a Braunschweig inventory in 1776.

No. 7 PORTRAIT BUST OF AN OLD MAN Fig. 7

canvas, 53 x 41 cm.

Bremen, Kunsthalle, no. 26

Provenance: Collection Garlich; gift to Kunsthalle in 1849 from Johannes Hopken.

No. 8 PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN WITH A GREEN HEADSCARF  
Fig. 8
canvas, 34 x 26 cm.
signed: Denner 1719
Formerly Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, no. 2064 (lost in war)
Recorded in a Dresden inventory in 1722.

No. 9 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN IN A BROWN COAT  
Fig. 9
canvas, 75 x 63 cm.
signed: Denner 1731
Formerly Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, no. 2066 (lost in war)
Pendant to Dresden no. 2067 (Cat. no. 10, below)

No. 10 PORTRAIT OF AN ELDERLY WOMAN IN A WHITE BONNET  
Fig. 10
canvas, 74 x 62 cm.
Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, no. 2067
Recorded in a Dresden inventory in 1754.
Pendant to Dresden no. 2066 (Cat. no. 9, above)

No. 11 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN WITH YELLOW-GOLD HEADSCARF  
Fig. 11
copper, 42 x 33 cm.
signed: Denner 1737
Formerly Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, no. 2068 (lost in war)
Recorded in a Dresden inventory in 1815.

No. 12 PORTRAIT OF AN ELDERLY WOMAN WITH A WHITE HEADSCARF  
Fig. 12
canvas, 43 x 33 cm.
signed: Denner fect
Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, no. 2070
Provenance: Acquired from the artist in 1730.
  Pendant to Dresden no. 2071
  (Cat. no. 13, below)

No. 13 PORTRAIT OF A MAN WITH LONG GREY HAIR
  Fig. 13
canvas, 43 x 33 cm.
Formerly Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen,
  no. 2071 (lost in war)
Provenance: Acquired from the artist in 1730.
  Pendant to Dresden no. 2070
  (Cat. no. 12, above)

No. 14 PORTRAIT OF A GREY-BEARDED OLD MAN
  Fig. 14
canvas, 36 x 30 cm.
Formerly Dresden Staatliche Kunstsammlungen,
  no. 2072 (lost in war)
Recorded in Dresden inventory in 1722.

No. 15 PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN MAN
  Fig. 15
signed: Denner 1726
Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. 548

No. 16 OLD MAN
  Fig. 16
canvas, 42 x 33 cm.
signed lower right: Denner fect
Hamburg, Kunsthalle, no. 409

No. 17 OLD WOMAN canvas, 63 x 53 cm.
Hamburg, Kunsthalle, no. 686

Literature: Gerkins, Zwei Hamburger Maler, no. 18, ill.

No. 18 OLD WOMAN canvas, 42.5 x 36.5 cm.
Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste no. 1489

No. 19 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN copper, 37 x 31 cm.
Leningrad, The Hermitage, no. 1326
Acquired before 1719.

No. 20 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN copper, 40 x 33 cm.

inscribed verso: Denner fec. 1726

Leningrad, The Hermitage, no. 7326

Provenance: Museum of Academy of Art to Leningrad in 1931.

This is a replica, probably autograph, of the Vienna Old Woman (Cat. no. 37, below)

No. 21 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN canvas, 54 x 43 cm.
signed right: Denner 1730

Leningrad, The Hermitage, no. 7152
Acquired in 1934.
No. 22  PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN  
canvas, 90 x 70 cm.  
signed lower right: Denner fec  
Leningrad, The Hermitage, no. 1324  
Provenance: Collection Gotskovskij in Berlin, to Leningrad in 1764.  
Replicas: Sarasota, Ringling Museum (see Cat. no. 1, above).  
In Leningrad Catalogue, 1958 as "St. Jerome."

No. 23  PORTRAIT OF A RUSSIAN ECCLESIASTIC  
canvas, 20 x 15 in.  
present location unknown  

No. 24  BUST PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN  
panel, 14 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.  
present location unknown  
Provenance: Sedelmeyer Gallery; Collection Mr. Charles T. Yerkes, New York; Sale Yerkes, New York, 1910.  

No. 25  PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN  
copper, 38 x 31 cm.  
signed lower right: Denner fec. 1724 London  
Paris, The Louvre, no. 1208  
Literature: Blanc, Mantz and Demmin, p. 3.
No. 26 OLD WOMAN IN A BONNET

canvas, 46.3 x 37.5 cm.
signed right: Denner fec. 1740
Paris, The Louvre, no. 1209
Provenance: Collection Louis-Philippe, acquired by Louvre in 1837.


No. 27 OLD WOMAN WITH A VEIL
copper on wood, 37 x 31 cm.
signed lower right: Denner fec
Paris, The Louvre
Provenance: La Caze Donation, 1869.
Possibly identical with a painting in Tours (Cat. no. 36, below)

No. 28 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN

canvas, 18 7/8 x 14 7/8 in.
San Francisco, de Young Museum

No. 29 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

copper, 36 x 31 cm.
signed lower right: Denner fect
Schleissheim, no. 1426
Provenance: Mannheim Gallery; Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
Pendant to Schleissheim no. 1427 (Cat. no. 30, below)
No. 30 PORTRAIT BUST OF AN OLD WOMAN

copper, 26 x 31 cm.
signed lower left: Denner fact
Schleissheim, no. 1426

Provenance: Mannheim Gallery; Alte Pinakotheek, Munich.

Pendant to Schleissheim, 1426
(Cat. no. 29, above)

No. 31 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

canvas, 46 x 39 cm.
signed: Denner fec:t
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, no. 262

No. 32 BUSTPORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

canvas, 33 x 27 cm.
signed: Denner 1731
Formerly Grossherzogl. Museum, no. 2337 (lost in war)

Lost from Schwerin was the probable companion piece to this, no. 2336.

No. 33 BUSTPORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN

canvas, 43 x 36 cm.
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, no. 2440

No. 34 PORTRAIT OF AN AGED WOMAN

canvas, 36 x 30 cm.
signed: Denner fec:t
Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, no. 260
Provenance: Collection C. G. Tessin; King Gustav III, no. 133; Kongl. Museum 1816 no. 647.

No. 35 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN  
Fig. 30

canvas, 36 x 30 cm.

signed: Denner fec:t

Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, no. 261

Provenance: Collection C. G. Tessin; King Gustav III, no. 133; Kongl. Museum 1816 no. 647.

Pendant to Stockholm no. 261  
(Cat. no. 35, below)

No. 36 HEAD OF AN OLD WOMAN  
Fig. 31

Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts

Provenance: Donation Lacaze, 1869.

No. 37 OLD WOMAN  
Fig. 32

canvas, 37 x 31 cm.

Vienna, Kunsthistoriches Museum, no. 675

Provenance: Purchased from the artist by an agent of Kaiser Karl VI in London, 1721.

Replicas: Hermitage, no. 7326 (Cat. no. 20, above); copy after: Sale Christie's, Coll. John Gibbons, 26 May 1894, no. 18, said to be "in the possession of Charles VI."


Pendant to Vienna no. 676  
(Cat. no. 38, below)

No. 38 OLD MAN  
Fig. 33

canvas 37 x 31.5 cm.

signed lower left: Denner fec:t 1726.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches, no. 676

Provenance: Commissioned in 1725 from the artist by Kaiser Karl IV.


Pendant to Vienna no. 675 (Cat. no. 37, above)

No. 39 PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

wood, 43 x 35.5 cm.

present location unknown

PART 2

UNVERIFIABLE ATTRIBUTIONS

This list is by no means complete. Included are the following: Pictures lost from museum collections in the war in cases where photographs are unavailable; paintings listed in museum catalogues of which I have seen no reproductions; art market pictures accompanied by poor illustrations in cases where there is a reasonable possibility of authenticity. This list would be unwieldy indeed if I were to include every Denner attribution that ever appeared in the trade. Omitted therefore are works which are clearly by an inferior hand.

Works lost from museums:

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN
panel, 37 x 30 cm.
Signed: Denner 1727
Gotha, Schlossmuseum
See Bernhard.

SMALL BUST PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
canvas, 33.5 x 29.3 cm.
Signed: Denner 1748
Schwerin, Grossherzogliches Museum, no. 2332
See Bernhard.

BUST PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN
canvas, 35.3 x 29.3 cm.
Schwerin, Grossherzogliches Museum, no. 2333
See Bernhard.
BUST PORTRAIT OF A VERY OLD WOMAN
Signed: Denner, 1731 cm.
Schwerin, Grossherzogliches Museum, no. 2336
See Bernhard.

BUST PORTRAIT OF AN ELDERLY WOMAN
copper, 36.7 x 31.4 cm.
Signed: Denner 1727
Schwerin, Grossherzogliches Museum, no. 2338
See Bernhard.

BUST PORTRAIT OF AN AGED MAN
copper, 36.7 x 31 cm.
Signed: Denner fec:
Schwerin, Grossherzogliches Museum, no. 2339
See Bernhard.

Works in museum collections not reproduced:

HEAD OF AN OLD MAN
panel, 15 1/2 x 12 in.
Hampton Court, no. 597
In Baker, no. 35, as, "Denner, (After?)"

HEAD OF A WOMAN
canvas 15 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.
Hampton Court, no. 596
First recorded in the Royal Collection in 1859.
In Manchester, German Art, no. 244, where the following note Appears: "The attribution is doubtful, perhaps painted by Seybold in the manner of Denner."
AN OLD WOMAN

University of Wurzburg, no. 243

OLD MAN WITH SANDGLASS AND SKULL

canvas, 90.7 x 80 cm.

Warsaw, National Museum, no. 76197

Acquired in 1932.

Pictures which have appeared in the trade—present location unknown:

AN OLD WOMAN'S HEAD


Note in Christies Catalogue, 1791: "This picture belonged to and was painted for his intimate friend and patron; nor can such another wonderful curiosity, or finished performance, be found in any other collection in Europe."

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD WOMAN

wood, 42 x 34 cm.

Signed with monogram

Provenance: Vienna, Sale Dorotheum, 23 November, 1908, no. 17.

OLD BEARDED MAN

canvas, 40 x 30 cm.

Provenance: Vienna, Sale Dorotheum, 6-8 November, 1917, no. 8

Sitter appears to be identical with that in East Berlin picture (Cat. 1, above).
HEAD OF AN OLD WOMAN
35.5 x 32 cm.

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
canvas, 30 x 32 cm.
Provenance: Vienna, Sale Glückselig, 18-20 April, 1928.

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
canvas, 64 x 47 cm.

BUSTPORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
wood, 48.5 x 28 cm.

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN
canvas, 62 x 48 cm.
Provenance: Collection L. Seyffers, Brussels; Sale Zuckermandel, 1930; Munich, Sale Helbing, 5-6 June, 1938. (in Munich catalogue as "certified by Dr. Glück.")

OLD WOMAN
canvas, 46 x 36 cm.
Provenance: Dortmund, Sale Cremer Collection, no. 56.

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
canvas, 59.7 x 40.6 cm.
Provenance: Hamburg, Sale Dr. Ernst Hauswedell Collection.
PART 3
REJECTED WORKS

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

canvas 40 x 33 cm.
Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, no. 600
Recorded in Braunschweig inventory in 1776.
See p. 96 above.

FATE

Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum, no. 1941.176
See p. 97 above.

HEAD OF AN OLD MAN

panel, 13 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.
Indianapolis, Museum of Art, no. 38.39
See p. 95 above.

PORTRAIT OF A MAN

panel, 16 1/2 x 13 3/8 in.
Oberlin, Allen Memorial Art Museum, no. 73.96
See p. 91 ff. above.

PORTRAIT OF A MAN

Private Collection
See p. 99 above.
AN OLD WOMAN

Fig. 40

46 x 36 cm.

Present location unknown


See p. 90 above.

HEAD OF AN OLD MAN

Fig. 41

canvas, 53 x 25 cm.

Present location unknown


See p. 98 above.

Attributed in auction catalogue to either Denner or Giuseppe Nogari.
The following documents pertaining to a picture lottery held by Denner are preserved in the State Archives of Schwerin. They were published by Eckart von Sydow in Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt XXI, 18 February, 1921, pp. 403-408.

August, 1746, Hamburg

Einrichtung der Schildereyen-Lotterie die mit Einwilligung der hohen Obrigkeit in Hamburg ehestens soll gezogen werden

Es hat Balthasar Denner durch viele Zeit und Mühe ein kleines Cabinet in Mahlerey auf Kupfer zum Stande gebracht. Dieses besteht aus fünf (so wohl jungen als alten) Köpfen, wodurch die Haupt-Grade der Distantzen dargestellt werden, und welche anzeigen, wie sich immer mehrere Kleinigkeiten hervorhun, wenn man sich seinem Gegenstande nähert. Diese Distantzen gehen von ohngefähr drei Fuss bis zu einen Fuss, und also zu allernächsten, welche man nehmen kann. Die Ausarbeitung ist folglich bis aufs höchste getrieben, und gleichet den beyden bekannten Köpfen, so sich von Denners Hand in der Wienerschen Gallerie befinden. Da nun dieses Cabinet nicht wohl kann getrennt werden, und seines Preises wegen nicht so gleich seinen Absatz findet; so ist der Entschluss gefasst, dasselbe, nebst neunundvierzig andern schönen Gemälden, theils von Denners eigner Hand, theils von andern berühmten Meisters, den Liebhabern in einer Lotterie darzulegen. Diese wird aus Tausend Lose jedes Loss zu zwee Ducaten Species bestehen, und folgende Gewinde enthalten:

Gew. Litra

1 A von Denner, bestehend aus vorbemeldten 5 Köpfen auf Küpfer, alle in nussbraunen Kästgens, wehrt Ducaten species---------- 1200

1 B dito, eine junge andächtige Frauens-Figur wie eine Maria Magdalena auch auf Kupfer, in einem Kasten, sehr ausgearbeitet------ 450
1 C Lingelbach, ein Stück mit vielen Figuren den St Markus Platz in Rom vorstellend, von seiner besten Zeit und sehr plaisant

1 D Netsger, zwey Kinder spielend mit einem Vogel, König Carolus der XII von Schweden mit seiner Prinzessin Schwester, fein gemahlt

1 E Peinacker, ein See-Haven sehr voll Gewühl und mit vielem Judicio gemahlt

1 F Denner, ein klein Fruchstück sehr ausgearbeitet

1 G P. Lastman die heilige Familie in einer Landschaft sehr gut

1 H Le Duc, ein Soldat auf der Schildwache mit Beywerck überrasend wohlgemahlet

1 I Denner, ein Kopf eines Bauern Mädchens fest und schön gemahlet

1 K dito, ein Kopf eines Knabens sehr rund, kräftig

1 L v. Goyen, eine Landschaft mit Figuren schön gemahlet

1 M Tintorett, da die 5000 Mann in der Wüste gespeiset werden

1 N Morellsen, Maria und das Christkind schön gemahlet

1 O Denner, ein junger Kopf

1 P dito, alter Kopf

1 Q dito, Blumentück

1 R Otto Marseus Kräuter, Vögel und Insekten

1 S Hondius, ein Schwan mit Hunde, sehr hübsch

1 T Momper, eine Landschaft flavines von V.d. Velde

1 V v. Goyen, ein dito sehr gut

1 W Denner, ein kleiner alter Kopf

21 Gewinne Ducaten Species 1912
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gew. Litra</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 X</td>
<td>von Denner, dito-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Y</td>
<td>dito, Bluhmen Stück----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Z</td>
<td>Agricola, eine Landschaft sehr gut------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 aa</td>
<td>dito------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bb</td>
<td>Diederich, Kräuter und Insecten wohl gemahlt--------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cc</td>
<td>Zeemann, ein plaisanter See-Haven-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 dd</td>
<td>dito------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ee</td>
<td>Caree, ein Vieh Stück--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ff</td>
<td>Paul Veronese, eine heidnische Opferung-------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 gg</td>
<td>Gelling, ein Stück mit Fischer------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hh</td>
<td>Momper, eine Landschaft------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ii</td>
<td>v. Dyck, ein Heiliger--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kk</td>
<td>v. d. Vinne, ein Stück in grau, tanzende Bettler vorstellend-----------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ll</td>
<td>Heemskerck, saussende Bauern, sehr gut---------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mm</td>
<td>dito, spielende Bauern-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 nn</td>
<td>NN, Tantzende Figuren in einer Landschaft-------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 oo</td>
<td>Molyn, eine kleine nette Landschaft------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>1 pp</td>
<td>Querfurt, eine Bataille------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 qq</td>
<td>dito------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 rr</td>
<td>Bellekin, todte Fische-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ss</td>
<td>Meyer, dito-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tt</td>
<td>Berghem, eine Landschaft mit Vieh und Figuren in grau------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 vv</td>
<td>v. d. Poel, ein Brandt bei Nacht--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ww</td>
<td>Bloemart, eine Landschaft-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 xx</td>
<td>dito-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 yy</td>
<td>Goltius, ein Student----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gew. Litra

1 zz v. Goyen, eine Landschaft--------------------- 3
1. aaa dito, eine Mühle----------------------------- 3
1 bbb Percellus, ein gut See-Stück----------------- 3

50 Gewinne thun zusammen Species Ducaten 2000

Diese Lotterie soll, in der gehörigen Ordnung, durch deeydigte Personen, und in Gegenwart derer Interessenten, die sich damit bemühen wollen, so bald sie zum Stande seyn wird, auf eine solche Art gezogen, damit man nichts, von alledem, was in solchen Fällen zu beobachten ist, dabei versäume.

Obbemeldtes Cabinet, wie auch die anderen Preise der Lotterie, sind bei Denner am Gänsemark alle Tage (ausgenommen des Sonnabends und Sonntags) des Vormittags von 10-12, und des Nachmittags von 3 bis 5 Uhr, einem jeden, der ein oder mehrere Losse für sich selbst, oder andere zu bekommen, welche mit seiner eignen Hand und seinem Petschaft geltig gemacht sind.

Wenn die Zahl der Liebhaber sich gefunden hat, (welches hoffentlich bald seyn wird), weil Kenner dies Cabinet für gantz was besonders halten, sodass es den Zusatz der zwéy Dukaten blass des Sehens halber verdienb, so soll der Tag der Ziehung in den öffentlichen Zeitungen, und nachhero durch gedruckte Bogen die Vertheilung des Glückes bekannt gemacht werden.

[The following from Senatsprotokoll, 5 August, 1746:]

Ad supplicam Balthas. Denners et ad velat. H. Brockes C. dem jungen Denner in seinem Gesuch zu willfahren und ihm also zu erlauben, das er ratione seiner Gemählde eine Lotterie anstelle; praeviatamen communicatione mit E. Oberalten.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I


2 Ibid.

3 See von Holst, Creators, p. 202 for a discussion of the importance of the Elbe River for the Hamburg art market.


5 Von Holst, Creators, p. 184.


8 Johan van Gool, De Nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlandtsche Kunstschilders en Schilderessen II, The Hague, 1751. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Denner is from this source. Subsequent sources agree in most particulars with
van Gool's account. When important discrepancies occur, they are reported in footnotes to the appropriate points in the text.

9Ibid., p. 63.

10Christian von Hagedorn, Lettre à un Amateur de la Peintre, Dresden, 1755, p. 275.

11Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, Merkwürdige Reisen durch Nedersachsen, Holland und England III, Ulm, 1754, p. 118 ff., reports that when he visited Denner in 1710 there were several works hanging in his studio. One of these was a copy of a Poussin canvas, the original of which belonged to a merchant in Danzig. Uffenbach does not specify the author of the copy, but presumably it was Denner himself. It is tempting to think this was one of Denner's exercises from his Danzig period when he was about fifteen years old. Unfortunately, the painting is impossible to trace.

12Nikolaus Pevsner, Academies of Art, Cambridge, England, 1940, p. 120.

13Ibid., p. 119.


15Van Gool, p. 65.

See Niemeijer, p. 199 ff., for an account of Denner's whereabouts in Holland in this period.

Van Gool mistakenly states that Denner died in 1747 in Hamburg. However all other sources concur in placing his death in Rostock in 1749.


Denner had at least one pupil outside of his family working in his shop, Dominicus van der Smissen. It is highly
unlikely that this rather uninspired artist had anything to do with the head studies, although he probably assisted Denner with formal portraits. For an account of van der Smissen see Niemeijer. The young Jacob Denner was also trained by his father as a portraitist, and seems not to have been involved with the head studies; see Lichtwark. Catherina, Denner's daughter, occupied herself as a miniaturist; see Lichtwark.

24Lichtwark, p. 137.


26Ibid., p. 19.

27Ibid., p. 46.

28Hamburg, Kunsthalle, Katalog der Alten Meister, 1956, Inv. no. 39.
29 Illustrated in George Poensgen, Antoine Pesne, Berlin, 1958, fig. 78.

30 Thieme-Becker Künstler Lexikon, s.v. "Manyoki, Adam."

31 Ibid.


33 Niemeijer, pp. 207-208.

34 Ibid., pp. 222-223.
CHAPTER II

1Niemeijer, p. 201. Feurly's father was a man of substantial wealth who collected an extensive library on Quaker theology. Niemeijer points out that Denner must have felt very much at home in the English-Dutch pietistic climate of the Feurly household.

2Van Gool, p. 68. In Charles Blanc, Paul Mantz and Auguste Demmin, Histoire des Peintures, École Allemande, Paris, 1875, p. 2, Mantz claims this picture was unfinished when Denner brought it to England. To my knowledge, no other sources mention the Old Woman as being unfinished, and the reactions of the people in Rotterdam imply that the picture was complete.

3Van Gool, p. 69.

4Ibid., pp. 69-70. (Van Mander's remarks are cited in full in Chapter V below.)

5Ibid., p. 70.

6Ibid.

7Ibid., p. 71, 4700 Imperial Guilders at 25 Stuivers each equals 5875 Dutch Guilders. Walpole reports the price at 5875 Imperial Florins or 470 Pounds Sterling. It is difficult to
recover the relative meaning of these figures, but the price paid for this painting caused as much comment as the work itself among Denner's contemporaries.

8Van Gool, p. 71.

9Ibid.

10Lichtwark, p. 134.

11See Appendix below.

12This can be deduced both from the kind of paintings called 'Porendenner' in the trade as well as in the sources.

13The Alte Frau is described as being painted before 1714 in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Verzeichnis der Gemälde, 1973. In létteris: 4 December, 1974, Dr. Karl Schütz of this museum explained that this terminus was based on Niemeijer's article (p. 201, note 3) where Denner was said to have taken the picture with him on a journey to Holland in 1714. This is a misreading of Niemeijer. Actually, the article states that Denner took a first trip to Holland in 1714. In 1721, he took a second, more extensive trip with his family to Holland and London. The Alte Frau accompanied Denner not on the 1714 journey, but rather on his second trip in 1721.

14Röthel, Bürgerliche Kultur, p. 86, makes reference to an unpublished doctoral thesis by Leber on the subject of Rembrandt's influence in Germany, Cologne, 1922. Röthel reports
that Leber made an abortive attempt to devise a chronology of the 'Porendenner' based on stylistic development. Unfortunately I have not been able to consult Leber's thesis.

The earliest dated 'Porendenner' is, to my knowledge, a Portrait of a Woman with a Green Headscarf of 1719 in Dresden; lost from the Schwerin collection was a Small Bust Portrait of an Old Man (Inv. no. 2332) dated 1748, the latest dated 'Porendenner.' I have only a blurred photograph of the former, and no reproductions seem to exist of the latter, and I cannot, therefore, offer a comparison of the earliest and latest examples.

Lichtwark, p. 134.


A consciousness of distinct stylistic modes as appropriate for different subjects is not uncommon in the eighteenth century. An instructive example of this is found in a Self Portrait of the Artist in His Studio of 1709 by Joannes Kupezky. (This is listed in Bushart, Deutsche Malerei des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts, Taunus, 1967, p. 27, as being in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum Collection, however it does not appear in the 1973 catalogue.) The artist is seated at his easel, looking out toward the viewer (who takes the position of the artist's model). He is at work on a formal portrait which has all the earmarks of the Rococo cosmetic idealization: pink cheeks, arched eyebrows, pure oval head,
etc. The artist himself, however, is painted in a naturalistic and objectively observed manner. No attempt is made to regularize the features or alter the tawny complexion. The contrast between the two heads in this picture is a most eloquent statement of the tension between the rationalistic bias that was so characteristic of Kupezky (as well as Denner) and the dictates of aristocratic fashion. I would suspect that these irreconcilable opposites underlie much of the art of the eighteenth century—especially in Germany.

19In the Witt Library Photographic Archives is a small photograph of a half-length Magdelen (location unknown). Denner's wife Esther was clearly the model for this painting. A St. Jerome, dated 1731, was recorded in an inventory at Dresden as early as 1754; however it was destroyed during the war (Inv. no. 2065). See also Appendix, B.


21Irene Geismeier, "Neuerwerbung der Gemäldegalerie," Forschungen und Berichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, XIII (1971) :29-34. According to Geismeier, the hands seem "anonymous and indifferent to the concern of age and sex." She attempts to explain their inferiority (which I do not see) by proposing Denner's son was responsible for their execution. However, this would have been nothing short of impossible since Denner's eldest son was born in 1720, the same year as the picture was dated.
22Ibid. See also, Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Costume."

23Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Costume."

24Hildegard Westhoff-Krummacher, Barthel Bruyn der Ältere, Munich, 1965, Cat. nos. 20, 76, 79.


27Illustrated in W. Martin, Gerard Dou, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1913, p. 19.

28Often the skull appears in self portraits. That this is not a portrait of Denner himself, however, is clear from his self portraits in Budapest and Schwerin.


30An excellent demonstration of the difficulties of basing Denner's chronology on stylistic evidence is provided by a comparison between this pair from Dresden and the ex-Schwerin Portrait of an Old Man, all from 1731. It is clear from these examples that Denner was inclined to practice completely divergent manners of painting simultaneously.
CHAPTER III

At this point it is worthwhile at least to mention Denner's own legacy in terms of the head studies. There is a handful of artists who made portrait studies of elderly models, most of whom were working around the middle of the century. Samuel Beck (1715-1778) has been called a follower of Denner although I find that label misleading. If anything, his work is closer to Seybold than Denner. Beck made head studies which record the wrinkles and sags of the faces of old men; the poses tend to be more momentary and the compositions less stable than Denner's. For an illustration of Beck's Old Man once in Gotha, see Richard Hamann, Die Deutsche Malerei vom Rokoko bis zum Expressionismus, Leipzig and Berlin, 1925, p. 40. Another so-called follower was Johann Georg Edlinger (1741-1819). For illustrations of Edlinger's paintings see Bushart, p. 27, and Hamann, p. 45. His Portrait of an Old Man in Augsburg is a representative example of his work. It is more an expressive "character head" than an objectively observed portrait. Edlinger's handling is comparatively broad, his poses unbalanced and momentary. The expressiveness of his studies connects them with the "Sturm und Drang" movement of the second half of the century. Von Holst, Creators, p. 199, mentions a Russian artist called Antropov, as an imitator of
Denner; I have not been able to discover reproductions or further information about this artist. In any case, while Beck and Edlinger might have been interested in Denner's head studies, they took inspiration from such a variety of sources that they ought not be called proper followers. Only Christian Seybold (see Chapter IV below) seems to have been directly inspired by the 'Porendenner.'

2This is not always true for Barthel Bruyn or Hans Holbein, however. From time to time we find brutally realistic and unflattering likenesses in their portraiture, but more often they subtly adjust irregularities of features and disguise imperfections to make their model appear more attractive in their portraits than they did in life.

3Von Holst, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Sammlertums und des Kunsthandels in Hamburg von 1700 bis 1840," Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgisches Geschichte 1939, pp. 256, 273-388. Approximately 85 percent of the artists collected in Hamburg until 1840 were Dutch seventeenth and eighteenth century; perhaps 5 percent of the paintings were by Hamburg artists like Denner, Scheits, and Jacobs. According to the inventories in the Appendix to the von Holst article, Metsu, Maes, van Mieris, and Dou were far better represented than Elsheimer or any of the Italians.

4Braunschweig, Verzeichnis, p. 88.

5Illustrated in Horst Gerson, Rembrandt Paintings, Amsterdam, 1968, fig. 29.
6 Ibid., fig. 31.

7 Ibid., fig. 36.

8 Berlin, Deutsche Maler und Zeichner, p. 64.

9 Ibid.


12 Von Holst, Creators, p. 199.

13 Ibid., p. 199.


15 Illustrated in Martin, p. 22.

16 Ibid., p. 23.

17 Ibid., p. 28.

18 Ibid., p. 38.
By this I do not mean to disparage Dou's talent as a painter. The fact that his works are not so redolent with spiritual content as those of Rembrandt does not make his paintings the less attractive. In terms of content, Dou's real strength is concentrated on the emblematic and allegorical levels of meaning; this fact further distinguishes his intentions from Denner's.

Röthel, Bürgerliche Kultur, pp. 19, 45. The following discouraging notice from the account book of the owner of the Hamburg opera house is cited by Röthel: "5 September, 1735; Julius Cesar (Handel): kam niemand und wurde nicht gespielt."


Röthel, Bürgerliche Kultur, p. 34.

Ibid., p. 53.

Max Batt, The Treatment of Nature in German Literature from Günther to the Appearance of Goethe's Werther, New York, 1907, p. 17.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Mennonite Encyclopedia, s.v. "Denner, Jacob."


33. The holdings of the Hamburg printroom include several: Inv. nos. 43992-43996.

34. Hamburg, Kunsthalle, Inv. no. 664.

35. *Ibid.* Inv. nos. 402, 403, 405, 664. See also Appendix below.


41. The Hamburg printroom and the Berlin Dahlem printroom each have extensive holdings of drawings of this type.
42 Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1910, ed., s.v., "Lavater, John Caspar."

43 Lavater.

44 Ibid., II, 2, p. 249.

45 Ibid., II, 2, p. 248. The Mannheim heads are probably identical with the pair now in Schleissheim; see Cat. nos. 29, 30, below.

46 Ibid., II, 2, p. 413.


48 Friedländer, Landscape, p. 238.

49 See especially Daniel Fink, "Vermeer's Use of the Camera Obscura," Art Bulletin (December, 1971); 493-505.


51 Professor Forbes Whiteside brought this example to my attention, for which I am grateful.

52 Charles-Antoine Jombert, Méthode pour Apprendre le Desssein, Paris, 1755.

53 Ibid., pp. 149-150.


56 Ibid.

57 Gernsheim.

58 Ibid., p. 27.

59 Ibid.


61 Ibid., p. 404.

62 Ibid., p. 407. See also Appendix below.

63 Röthel, *Bürgerliche Kultur*, p. 86, note 89. See also Chapter V below.
CHAPTER IV


2Ibid.

3The two Dresden head studies, nos. 2094 and 2095, were acquired prior to 1753, therefore during Seybold's own lifetime; they are not signed. The Hannover Old Woman was sold in 1926 from the Fedei Gallery. Interestingly, a Denner head study was sold at the same time from this collection (Dr. Reinhold Behrens, in litteris, 1 November, 1974). Finally there is a head study which was on the art market of which I have seen only the photograph, Platt Collection, Princeton, V. 300, p. 83. It was called simply Portrait of the Artist's Wife, and the model is probably identical with that in the Dresden Old Woman. I am reasonably certain that all these paintings are by Seybold's hand.

4A replica of this picture appeared on the art market as Denner: photograph at Witt Library, no information available. An Old Man once in Gotha attributed to Samuel Beck seems to be a very free copy of the Dresden picture. For illustration see Hamann, p. 41. The sitter appears to be identical with the Dresden old soldier, but he wears a plain cardigan jacket.
and white shirt instead of fur and armor. The picture has been cut down, cropping the signature to "Bec."

5 See note 3 above.

6 See note 3.

7 Emden Sale, Lepke: Berlin, 9 November, 1915, no. 140.

8 Braunschweig, Verzeichnis, p. 49.

9 Peltzer, p. 267.

10 The possibility that some of these genre portraits might be by J. G. V. Edlinger deserves further investigation.

11 Bersohn Sale, Wilder: Warsaw, 24 May, 1909, as B. Denner or G. Nogari.

12 Illustrated in Hamann, p. 45.

13 Peltzer illustrates several.
CHAPTER V

1Rothe1, Bürgerliche Kultur, pp. 93-94. Illustration opposite p. 56.

2Ibid., p. 94.

3Ibid., pp. 93-94.

4Ibid., p. 69.

5Van Gool, pp. 69-70.

6Ibid., pp. 81-82.

7Von Hagedorn, p. 277.

8Walpole, pp. 669-670.


11Blanc, Mantz and Demmin, pp. 1-4.

12Ibid., p. 1.

13Ibid., pp. 2-3.
I have generally omitted from this chapter the remarks of such writers who merely vent their spleen about Denner without saying anything substantial. However, the following cases I include in this note both because they are representative of the unbridled contempt in which English connoisseurs held Denner in the early years of this century and because they demonstrate, in a sense, the nadir of Denner's Fortuna Critica. The following is from Bryans Dictionary of Painters and Engravers, 1903 ed., s.v. "Denner, Balthasar," "A German painter whose works surprise by the toilsome servility of their finish, as much as they disgust by a total absence of all that is estimable in the art, was born in Hamburg in 1685." Elsewhere, Denner is referred to as "this mechanic in the art." Paul Konody, and Maurice Brockwell make the following comment in The Louvre, London, 1910, p. 167: "The work of the Hamburg
painter Baltasar (sic) Denner has no claim to be considered as a manifestation of art: it is merely a display of mechanical skill."

22 Schmidt.


24 V. C. Habicht, Der Niedersächsische Kunstkreis, Hannover, 1930.

25 Schmidt, p. 36.

26 Ibid.

27 Osborn, pp. 74-75.

28 Habicht, p. 304.

29 Ibid., p. 302.

30 Ibid. p. 304.

31 Röthel, Bürgerliche Kultur, p. 86, note 89.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


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