



## Self-Portrait

### Date

about 1680

### Primary Maker

Thomas Smith

### Medium

oil on canvas

### Description

Thomas Smith's Self-Portrait is a half-length representation of a seated man facing three-quarters left. The man's gray hair is parted in the center and shoulder length. Long, individual strokes of gray and white are painted over broadly painted areas of gray and brown. The man's features are slightly stylized and sharply modeled. His blue eyes bulge under drooping eyelids and look directly at the viewer. The skin is wrinkled at the outer corner of the proper left eye and at the bridge of the nose. A light pink highlight runs the length of the nose and draws attention to its prominent size. The mouth is straight, and the upper lip has a gray shadow that extends into the creases around the mouth. The chin is round, with a fleshy throat just below. The skin tones vary from light pink under the eyes and on the chin to darker pink on the cheeks and gray in the creases along the mouth and in the shadows. Some of the ground color shows through the flesh tones on the nose and above the mouth. The man's coat is black and indistinct, due in part to the blached surface of the painting. The most prominent feature of the costume is a ruffled lace neck cloth, which is gathered at the throat. The lace pattern features a matrix of crossed lines with a design of cascading vines and stylized flowers. The man's proper right hand rests on top of a skull. The four fingers conform to the curvature of the skull, and the tip of the thumb extends in the air slightly. The hollowed-out eyes are nearly perfectly circular, and the hole of the nose is simplified to an inverted heart. A band of tiny teeth form a slight arc. Below the skull is a sheet of white paper on which a poem and monogram signature have been inscribed within faintly visible ruled lines. The paper extends over the edge of the red cloth-covered table on which it sits. Though the artist took care to paint highlights to suggest the folded paper occupying space, he also tipped the letter up unrealistically to allow the viewer to read the text easily. Smith sits in a red upholstered chair trimmed with a yellow border along the top edge. Large yellow tacks secure the red fabric to the chair frame. Only a corner of the chair is visible to the viewer. Above the chair is a red curtain with several folds defined by wide black lines. The curtain is held in place by a cord, from which hangs a yellow tassel. This drapery is placed against a solid field of unmodulated black. At the upper left corner of the painting is a vertically oriented rectangle, which presumably represents a window. Visible in this scene is a naval battle and a fortress. The battle features three ships, the nearest of which lists in the water, presumably vanquished by one or both of the other vessels. The closest of the two upright ships is turned nearly in profile for the viewer, revealing at least ten gun portals. At the stern of this ship flies a red flag with a loosely painted white design in its field. The distant ship is parallel to the middle ground ship and flies three flags—a rectangular flag with a red, white, and blue stripe at the stern and at the top of the middle mast and a blue pennant on the next mast forward. Orange flames rise up between the two ships, suggesting that they are engaged in battle with each other or with another vessel beyond view. A touch of blue is visible in the sky, which is mainly filled with large clouds that blend with the smoke. A red flag on the lower portion of the fort in the foreground features three crescents and a small circle in the concave curve of each crescent. A plain red flag flies on top of the fort's highest tower.

### Dimensions

canvas: 62.9 × 60.3 cm (24 3/4 × 23 3/4 in.) framed: 71.8 × 68.4 cm (28 1/4 × 26 15/16 in.)