

Blurry as tremor

Figure Regentesses of the Old Men's Almshouse, 1664



Courtesy of Frans Hals Museum, oil on canvas, Haarlem. Photograph: Margareta Svensson. For the painter to have seen the shoulders at 2 levels steadily, the frequency of oscillation should have been about human flicker fusion threshold (16 Hz), characteristic of orthostatic tremor.

The late Renaissance Dutch painter Frans Hals (1582–1666) was a master of revealing his subjects' peculiarities. However, in the *Regentesses* (figure), he shows a neurologic condition—the blurred shoulder margin of the woman in the middle suggests trembling in a standing figure.¹

Is it possible that Hals, who once amazed Van Gogh² by his 27 “blacks,” borrowed a technique from double exposure photography¹ centuries in advance to depict a fairly common (e.g., parkinsonian or essential) tremor? Or the alternative: he painted what he saw—very fast trembling, producing illusion of double shoulders—perhaps the earliest depiction of orthostatic tremor.

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