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PANORAMIC

THE LEIDEN ART REVIEW

Special Issue
Art on Paper



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Colophon

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Note from the editor

This special issue of *Panoramic* is devoted to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Netherlandish drawings held at the Special Collections of Leiden University Libraries. Drawings constitute an indispensable source for the study of early modern artistic practice. They reveal the processes of invention, artistic experimentation, and transmission underpinning the creation of other works such as paintings and prints, while also demonstrating the autonomy of drawing as a mode of expression in its own right.

Leiden University is in the unique position to have an excellent collection of works on paper, available for research and teaching purposes. The contributions presented in this issue are the outcome of the Master course *Art on Paper* in our Arts and Culture program, designed by Prof. Dr. Yvonne Bleyerveld and taught in 2025 by Dr. Saskia Cohen-Willner. The course was set up to provide students with the opportunity to engage directly with this original material, and to develop independent research on questions of the function, technique, provenance, reception and authorship of these works. The resulting essays reflect the rigor of their object-based research, combined with current methodological approaches in art history.

The students selected their drawings covering several prevailing themes. Caterina Gambirasio addressed the subjects of *ruins* through the study of a drawing long ascribed to the amateur artist Claes van Beresteyn, while perceiving ruins as objects encapsulating memories and evoking the passage of time. Olivia Dawe studied the drawing of *myth and mythology* by Karel van Mander, in the wake of a continued reflection on classical antiquity. Zara Keijzer and Caroline Biały addressed realistic and fantastical aspects of the depiction of the *female nude*, that all important subject in the artistic training and practice of the Dutch Republic, through works by Jacob Backer and Joachim Wtenwael. Patrizia Luzi and Teresa Carvalheira delved into the topic of the drawing of *landscape* done after life, from memory or after example. Anne van Waart en Jiarui Feng chose drawings by the accomplished amateur artist Jacob Esselens and the well-established Isaac van Ostade to discuss the theme of *genre* drawing. Thirza van Rooijen en Pia Pesce Cánepa studied drawings of lesser or more fantastical *animals*, through works by Cornelis Saftleven and Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne. And Suzanne van Stratum and Gargi Tupkar took on the well-loved subject of drawings of *plants and flowers*, through their engagement with works by Balthasar van der Ast and Jacob (Jacques) de Gheyn.

The editors wish to express their gratitude to the staff of Leiden University Libraries, especially drs. Jef Schaeps, curator Prints & Drawings at the Leiden University Libraries, and Sanne Hansler of the Special Collections of Leiden University Libraries, for so generously facilitating access to the drawings and supporting this collaboration between teaching and research in every way possible. They would also like to thank their colleagues dr. Christi Klinkert, Senior Curator of Old Masters at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, and dr. Daantje Meeuwissen, assistant professor in Early Modern Art History of Northern Europe at Utrecht University, for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm for art, research and the art of curating with our students.

Saskia Cohen-Willner

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Authors

Caroline Biaty is currently pursuing an MA degree in art history at Leiden University. She has a strong appreciation for, and interest in, the painting traditions of the Renaissance period, twentieth-century movements, and modern art, while also being drawn to the richness of decorative arts. Her fascination lies in Art Nouveau and Art Deco, which she is exploring in greater depth in her upcoming MA thesis.

Olivia Dawe studied *History* (BA) at McGill University. Her studies in *Art History* (MA) at Leiden University have focused on Dutch and Italian design drawings from the 16th century. During her internship at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, she researched Dutch papercutting in preparation for a cabinet presentation called *The Art of Papercutting*.

Jiarui Feng travelled across the continents to pursue an MA degree in *Arts and Culture* at Leiden University. Her interest primarily focuses on politically engaged art in the modern period, with additional interests in cultural objects linked to youth subcultures and in the field of social art history.

Caterina Gambirasio is an MA *Museum Studies* student at Leiden University. Her love for art, nurtured by her BA in *Cultural Heritage* has flourished, extending to the realm of Old Master drawings. She is currently pursuing a career as a curator, but her interests extend to the subjects of equality and diversity in society. After a thesis concerning the subject of ruins and restoration, she has maintained a passion for the subject.

Zara Keijzer is a student at Leiden University in the Netherlands. After obtaining her BA degree in *Philosophy*, she completed a pre-master in *Art History* and is currently pursuing an MA degree in *Museum Studies*. Her interests lie in aesthetics and the design of exhibition spaces in museums. She is currently working on a thesis concerning open conservation and restoration spaces in Dutch museums.

Patrizia Luzzi holds an MA degree in *Historical and Cultural Heritage* and a PhD in *Philosophical Anthropology and Fundamentals of Science*. She is interested in Art Historiography and in the relationship between Art History and curatorial practice. She is the author of the articles *Arte islamica e Museo nel XXI secolo* (*Nuova Museologia* N°40, 2019) and *Curating the contemporary at University Museums* (*The Museum Review*, Volume 5, Number 1, 2020).

Pia Pesce Cánepa was born and raised in Chile. Surrounded by books and animals while growing up, she developed a deep curiosity for both culture and nature. She studied History at university, but over time discovered that her true passion lies in museums, places where stories, art, and knowledge come alive. After spending her life in Chile, she decided to move to the Netherlands to continue her studies

Authors

and pursue this passion. In her work and interests, she tries to bring together the worlds that shaped her.

Teresa Cristina Ramos Carvalheira is an MA student in *Arts and Culture - Museum Studies* at Leiden University, investigating various aspects of crimes against art, antiques, and antiquities. She holds a bachelor's degree in *Art History* from the University of Lisbon's School of Arts and Humanities and a postgraduate qualification in *Medieval Studies*. Additionally, she possesses a postgraduate degree in *Criminology and Criminal Investigation* from Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias in Lisbon. Her research focuses on analysing different museum thefts and their problematic aspects during criminal investigations, as well as methods for investigating crimes against art.

Thirza van Rooijen followed the MA *Museum Studies* at Leiden University. She has a special interest in public history, feminism, museum ethics, and the relationship between museums and artists. After her studies, she hopes to continue working in the cultural and museological field, either making exhibitions, doing research, or teaching. What drives her is the opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive, ethical, and engaging museum practice.

Suzanne van Stratum has a variety of interests. She graduated with a BA in *Political Science* and *Art History*, both at Leiden University. Van Stratum is interested in the way culture is featured and worked with, within the national government's policy, but also on the international level within the European Union. Currently, van Stratum is finishing the master *Arts and Culture*, with the specialisation of *Art History*.

Gargi Tupkar, originally from India, is currently finishing up their MA degree in archaeological sciences at Leiden University. As a former student of anthropology, their interests lie in the intersection of natural and social sciences to understand how cultures create and are created. Aside from their MA, they have also been an artist since childhood and thus, studied art history briefly at Leiden, blending their interest of studying the past with their hobbies in the hope to understand how art traditions evolve in relation to cultural environments they exist in.

Anne van Waart is a student of the MA *Museum Studies* at Leiden University, with a BA degree in *Archaeology* and a minor in *Conservation and Restoration*. They prefer to take a more practical approach to art, studying how artworks were made, used and changed over time. Their academic interests are focussed on medieval art and architecture, draftsmanship and decorative arts.

Artist biographies

BALTHASAR VAN DER AST (1593-1657)

Balthasar van der Ast was born in Middelburg after June 30, 1593 and died before December 19, 1657 in Delft. In 1619, Van der Ast registered as a master-painter with the Utrecht Guild of St. Luke. Later, in 1632, he moved to Delft, where he also registered with the painters' guild and remained active until his death.¹ During his time in Utrecht, he worked closely with Roelant Savery, with whom he shared an interest in naturalistic subjects such as flowers, insects, reptiles and shells.²

Van der Ast is best known for his oil paintings, but more than 480 drawings have also been attributed to him, mostly executed in watercolour on paper. These drawings show isolated flowers, most of them numbered and signed with the monogram "B.A."³ They functioned as preparatory studies for his paintings, which evolved from symmetrical bouquets to more dynamic compositions with flowers in a fruit basket or bowl.⁴ His work appealed to both collectors and naturalists, and he was probably trained in the studio of his brother-in-law, Ambrosius Bosschaert, considering that artist's influence on Balthasar's early flower and fruit pieces.⁵

JACOB ADRIAENSZ. BACKER (1608/09 – 1651)

Jacob Adriaensz. Backer, also known as Jacob Backer, was born in Harlingen around 1608/09 as the son of Adriaen Tjercksz. and Hilcke Volckertsdr. He grew up in a family of believers, with a Mennonite father who was also a baker. His mother died early on in his life, in 1611, after which his father remarried Elske Roelofs, who was living in Amsterdam. Backer, his father and his two brothers moved in with their stepmother

and her daughter and son.⁶ So, although born in Harlingen, Backer spent most of his younger years in Amsterdam. Arnold Houbraken writes about him that he achieved a lot of fame among art lovers with his varied works, from painted histories to chimney pieces.⁷ His oeuvre consists mostly of painted portraits, *historiestukken* and drawn nude studies. There are few known contemporary documents about him, mainly because Backer never married, nor owned real estate or businesses that needed formal registration.⁸ There is also no record of any correspondence between him and other parties.

After the death of his father, it is thought Backer moved to Leeuwarden to further develop his painting skills in the studio of Lambert Jacobsz.⁹ In 1633 he returned to Amsterdam and in 1634 he received his first official commission. According to a Houbraken, Backer entered a further apprenticeship upon his return to Amsterdam, yet there is little tangible evidence to support this assumption.¹⁰ Most of Backer's works are signed with monogram JAB.

Backer's extant drawings consist almost exclusively of figure studies, often directly connected to his paintings. They most likely originate from the two albums containing 84 drawings, mentioned in the posthumous inventory of his brother Tjerck Adriaensz. Backer, from 1659.¹¹

In his Amsterdam period, Backer would have drawing sessions with other artists. They would hire a model to pose nude for them, so they could study the subject. He belongs to the first group of Amsterdam draftsmen to have sessions of that kind, starting as early as the 1630s. Contrary to Rembrandt, who preferred to draw models as they appeared before him, warts and all, draftsmen from the group to which Backer

belonged choose models and poses that radiated *welstant*.¹² It is because of this pursued ideal, drawings from this Amsterdam group are often labelled as 'sophisticated'.

CLAES VAN BERESTEYN (1629-1684)

Claes van Beresteyn was a Dutch painter, draftsman and etcher. He was born in Haarlem in 1629 to a ruling-class family and was the youngest of six children. Very little is known about his life. It is believed that he learned both the art of painting and etching from Pieter Cornelisz. Verbeeck, an artist who specialised in landscapes and was related to Van Beresteyn through his marriage in 1643 to Elisabeth van Beresteyn, Claes' sister. Around the same time, in 1644, Claes entered the Guild of St. Luke and became the pupil of Salomon de Bray, architect and painter, also residing in the Haarlem region. Furthermore, Claes drew inspiration from Jacob van Ruisdael, who was among the first artists depicting small scenes of natural elements from life, rather than the more common wide sceneries.

Beresteyn is considered to be a dilettante or amateur artist who practiced art for personal enjoyment rather than a professional career, a privilege mostly reserved for the sons of wealthy families. Consequently, the artistic legacy of Beresteyn is limited, and only a small number of his works are preserved. A single painting by Beresteyn is signed, representing his brother-in-law with a horse. However, he is most renowned for a series of nine etchings, almost all dated and signed with his usual monogram CVB.

The prevailing subject in Beresteyn's art is nature, in particular small scorches of landscapes in which nature is the undisputed main character. It is believed that most of these works were created *naer 't leven* (from life), in the vicinity of Haarlem, where he lived with his family his whole life. He died

on March 5th, 1684, in Haarlem, and he was buried there five days later.

Claes van Beresteyn has traditionally been considered the creator of *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*, based on the attribution by the collector A. Welker. However, the authorship of the artwork has been discussed and refuted in more recent times. Although it has not been possible to attribute the drawing with greater certainty, the topic is addressed in the essay in an attempt to reach some conclusions.

JACOB ESSELENS (1626/27-1687)

Jacob Esselens was a Dutch trader, draftsman and painter. He was born in 1626/1627 in Amsterdam and buried there on 15 January 1687. On 20 April 1668 he married Janneken Jans. His activities as a trader of silks and velvet were beneficial to his artistic career as they allowed him to travel extensively. Places he visited include England, Scotland, Germany, Italy and France. Here he made accomplished landscape drawings from life. Esselens also produced imaginary landscapes of riverbanks, coastlines and woodlands. In many of these non-topographical landscapes, figures play an important role and can thus be considered genre drawings. His coast and river scenes, for example, often include fishermen selling their wares to townsfolk, while his other works show idyllic, pastoral scenes with ladies and gentlemen at leisure.¹³ Besides being a skilled draftsman, Esselens was also a painter of landscapes and portraits. His drawings and sketches, however, make up the majority of his oeuvre. In comparison very little paintings are known. Perhaps his mercantile work allowed him little time to paint.¹⁴

As an artist Esselens was mostly self-taught and can be considered an amateur. His works show the influence from many other artists. Esselens may have learnt from other

draftsmen through projects and joint trips. In 1662, for example, his mercantile work took him to England and Scotland. Here he made panoramic views of English towns for the Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem. The artists Willem Schellinks and Lambert Doomer were also part of this project. It is possible the artists inspired each other or even worked together.¹⁵ A year later, in 1663, Esselens travelled to Germany along the Rhine with senior artists Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout and Jan Lievens. Their influence is clearly visible in Esselens' landscapes with parallel shading in pen and sepia.¹⁶ Furthermore, Esselens' works in black chalk and grey wash also betray the influence from other artists, namely Anthonie Waterloo, Jan van Goyen and again Jan Lievens. At one point he may have worked with Waterloo in particular. Both artists were active in Amsterdam and Waterloo appears to have copied and published Esselens' drawings in print.¹⁷ Finally, his paintings too show influence from others. His seaside views are similar to Adriaen van de Velde and Simon de Vlieger, while his arcadian landscapes are reminiscent of those by Cornelis van Poelenburgh.¹⁸

Esselens died a wealthy man and appointed his friend and fellow merchant Abraham Rutgers as guardian to his children and administrator of his estate.¹⁹

JACOB DE GHEYN II (1565-1629)

Jacob de Gheyn was born in 1565 in Antwerp, Belgium and died 29 March 1629 in The Hague. He was a versatile painter and draftsman, excelling in still-life, religious scenes, and allegorical subjects. De Gheyn moved from Antwerp to Haarlem in 1585-90 to join the studio of Hendrick Goltzius. He studied under him for five years, after which he began to publish prints himself.²⁰ He moved to Leiden around 1598, where he established himself as a mature and indeed

prosperous artist, becoming part of the Leiden circle of art collectors at the time.

Upon his move to Leiden, he created portrait engravings of several notable figures from the city, including professor Carolus Clusius, the celebrated botanist and founder of the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden.²¹ This relationship may have eventually played a role in his later artwork related to flora and fauna, pioneering new perspectives in the genre of flower still life and autonomous animal depictions.²² His initial work within flora and fauna was closely associated with Goltzius' style which showcased mannerist and dramatic representation of nature. Towards the later phase of his career, he began to observe the natural environments for keen details, creating highly realistic depictions.

KAREL VAN MANDER (MEULEBEKE 1548-HAARLEM 1606)

Of all of his characterizers - painter, poet, playwright, designer, and art theorist - Karel van Mander is best known as the author of the *Schilder-boeck* (1604). Born into a noble family in Meulebeke, Flanders, he trained as an artist under Lucas de Heere and Pieter Vlerick, shortly after which he began his formative journey to Rome. Leaving in 1573, he would return four years later following his introductions to Italian mannerism, Giorgio Vasari and a lifelong friend, Bartholomeus Spranger. Fleeing religious unrest in Flanders, Van Mander eventually settled in Haarlem in 1583, where he became a key figure in the artistic milieu alongside Hendrick Goltzius and Cornelisz Cornelisz. In printmaking, he collaborated largely with Jacques de Gheyn II and Jacob Matham, though notably never with Goltzius.

Van Mander's enduring legacy rests in his *Schilder-boeck*, an ambitious art-theoretical and biographical compendium that positioned Netherlandish painting within a

broader European tradition of art literature. Although the facts of his life come from a single, posthumous biography of uncertain authorship, the extent of his artistic contributions firmly establish him as a foundational voice in Northern Mannerism and early modern art historiography.

ISAACK VAN OSTADE (1621-1649)

Isaack van Ostade was a Dutch Golden Age painter and draftsman, born in Haarlem in 1621. He began his artistic training under the guidance of his elder brother, Adriaen van Ostade, who was eleven years older.²³ Isaack remained in his apprenticeship until around 1639, when he set up his own independent practice.

In his early career, Isaack's style was closely aligned with Adriaen's, particularly in the depiction of interior tavern scenes and peasant life. Nevertheless, Isaack soon developed a distinctive artistic voice, moving away from dim interiors toward vibrant outdoor scenes. From 1642 onward, a new lightness and pastoral grace appeared in Isaack van Ostade's work, setting him apart from his brother Adriaen. This shift aligns him with Dutch painters influenced by Italian art, especially Pieter van Laer, who returned to Haarlem in 1639 after over a decade in Rome.²⁴

Van Ostade died in Haarlem in 1649, at the age of just 28. Although his career was brief, he left behind an impressive body of work, with around 400 paintings attributed to him. His drawings, too, reflect a spontaneous and exploratory spirit and played an important role in his training. A significant portion of drawings from Isaack van Ostade's early period have survived, including the drawing featured here. Over time, he moved beyond the themes and compositional strategies borrowed from his brother Adriaen, developing a more independent artistic voice. His oeuvre demonstrated variety in subject matter,

technique, and style.²⁵ Most notably, while Adriaen's drawings tend to concentrate on figures in interior scenes, Isaack's compositions expand outward to encompass landscape and architecture, revealing a broader interest in setting and spatial narrative.²⁶

Though van Ostade's life was cut short before he could fully mature as an artist, the work he left behind offers a compelling glimpse into his creative range and evolving vision.

ABRAHAM RUTGERS (1632-1699)

Abraham Rutgers was born in Amsterdam in 1632 as the son of David Rutgers (1601-1668) and Susanna de Flinnes (?-1677). In 1659 he married Anna van Hoeck who died in 1674 in childbirth.

He was a textile merchant by profession and an amateur draftsman. He was self-taught and his style might have been influenced by Rembrandt. Some of his drawings have been attributed to Johannes Leupenius and Philips Koninck. He was a close friend of the painter and draftsman Jacob Esselens, who was also a textile merchant.

In the Museum Simon van Gijn in Dordrecht, there is an album of eighty-eight drawings by Rutgers which bears the title "*88 Tekeninge door Abraham Rutgers getekent Ao 1686 en 1687 zynde Principale, Inventive & Copijen*".²⁷ The words *principale*, *inventive* and *copijen* refer respectively to original drawings made after nature, imaginary landscapes with mountains and ruins, and copies of other artists. The album is interesting as a topographical document because it was possible to determine in which environment a large number of drawings were created. It was studied by J. W. Niemeijer, who showed that many drawings depict locations in the proximity of Utrecht and the River Vecht. Rutgers' drawings are

remarkable for their pronounced prospective effects achieved by the use of diagonal and circular lines. They strike the viewer for their aesthetic quality and are also interesting as topographical documents.

CORNELIS SAFTLEVEN (1607-1681)

Cornelis Saftleven (1607-1681) was a versatile Dutch painter, draftsman, and engraver, best known for his imaginative scenes of hell, allegories, animal studies, and peasant interiors.²⁸ He was the eldest son of painter Herman Saftleven (c. 1580-1627) and Lijntge Cornelisdr. Moelants (?-1625). The family moved to Rotterdam shortly after Saftleven's birth, where his brother Herman Saftleven II (1609-1685) was born. Both of them received their initial training in Rotterdam, possibly under their father's guidance, before travelling to Antwerp around 1632. During this time, he was portrayed by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) for the *Iconographia* series, earning the title *Hollandus Pictor Noctium Phantasmatum* ("Dutch painter of nightly phantasms").²⁹ Saftleven collaborated with artists such as David Teniers II (1610-1690) and, alongside his brother Herman, painted barns, landscapes with herders, peasant interiors, and historical subjects. In those paintings, as well as his drawings, animal figures were prominently present.³⁰ He maintained his style even further when he permanently relocated to Rotterdam around 1637.

Here, he became an influential figure in the local art scene, taking on pupils including Ludolf de Jongh (1616-1679), Abraham Hondius (c. 1631-1691), and Egbert van der Poel (1621-1664). His influence even extended to Pieter de Hooch's (1629-1684) early tavern interiors.³¹ He was a prolific draftsman known for finely observed figure and animal studies. Many of his drawings were carefully signed and dated, intended as works of art in their own right.³² His

legacy lies in his fantastical, often darkly humorous imagery and his keen observation of life and nature. Saftleven had a particular skill in painting animals, frequently assigning them active roles in his compositions. As a draftsman, he was especially recognised for his black chalk studies of individual figures, usually young men, and detailed animal studies that reflect the influence of Roelant Savery (1576-1639). Even though he was recognised in his time, he achieved less popularity than his brother Herman and appeared to have led a quiet life.³³

ADRIAEN PIETERSZ. VAN DE VENNE (1589-1662)

Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne was a Dutch painter, engraver, and illustrator known for his satirical and allegorical works. Born in Delft to a merchant family, he was drawn to art early on. He moved to Middelburg in 1614, where he trained and developed a style influenced by Flemish painters like Pieter Bruegel the Elder, focusing on monochromatic landscapes and peasant scenes with moral undertones.

In 1625, van de Venne relocated to The Hague, marking a significant shift in his career. He joined the Guild of Saint Luke and co-founded the Confrerie Pictura, which aimed to elevate the status of painters. His palette became more colourful, and he took on commissions, including works for the Dutch court. Alongside painting, he was a skilled illustrator, collaborating with poets like Jacob Cats on emblem books that combined visual art with moralistic themes. Van de Venne's artistic development reflected broader Dutch Golden Age trends, transitioning from restrained tones to vibrant compositions. His works offered sharp social commentary, blending realism with symbolism. He continued working in The Hague until his death in 1662. His legacy endures in his ability to merge fine art with

literature, making him a unique voice in 17th-century Dutch art.

ANTHONIE WATERLOO (1609-1690)

Antonie Waterloo was a renowned draftsman, painter and etcher of mainly landscapes. He was born in 1609 in Lille (Rijssel), at the time part of the Habsburg Netherlands. His mother, Magdalena Vailant, came from a well-established family of etchers, and his father, Caspar Waterloo, was a cloth-shearer.³⁴ For religious reasons the family moved North, first in 1620 to Leiden and the Amsterdam, where in 1621 his mother registered as a member of the Walloon church, a congregation to which Antonie also belonged as a document from 1630 would attest. In 1640 he married Catharina (Cathalyne) Stevens van der Dorp, the widow of Elias Honics, and between 1641 and 1651 they had six children. It is known his wife brought some wealth into the marriage, owning a number of paintings and some lands in Flanders.³⁵

Little is known about Waterloo's training as an artist. It has been suggested he was mainly self-taught, yet the fact that he came from an artistic family from his mother's side makes this less likely. In 1653 he moved to Leeuwarden, yet in 1654 he is perhaps back in Amsterdam, when his young daughter was buried there. Waterloo moved to Maarssen, a town near Utrecht, and later, in 1688, probably moved to Utrecht, where he lived and died only a few years later at the Job's Hospital.

Waterloo travelled extensively in the Netherlands, Germany – among others along the Rhine – Switzerland, Poland and France. It has been suggested he also travelled to Italy, on account of the Italianate influences in his work. It is however very well possible he took this from work of other artists, such as Jan Both. Although registered as a painter, his success was established mainly by his works on paper. He

produced hundreds of landscape drawings and prints, from very detailed, topographically accurate views to more atmospheric impressions of woody landscapes. He published his own plates, with most of them going on to being reprinted into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when his works were avidly collected.³⁶ Waterloo is also known to have acquired plates by other artists and published them under his own name. Even though he was well-travelled, many of his landscapes were probably reimagined in the studio and often strongly influenced by the work of other artists.

JOACHIM ANTONISZ. WTEWAEEL (1566-1638)

Joachim Wtewael was born in 1566 in Utrecht to glassmaker and painter Anthoni Jansz. Wtewael and mother Anthonia van Schayck. In his teenage years, he engraved glass with his father, while later developing his skills for the design of stained glass works. Wtewael travelled throughout Italy and France for four years, where he learned and fostered his drawing techniques, following the style of local masters, by which he remained influenced throughout his life. Wtewael's drawing and painting style is now closely associated with Northern European Mannerism; in his time, he was among the early artists directly influenced by the Italian Mannerists. Within his lifetime, he focused predominantly on paintings which he planned out in preliminary drawings, several of which preserved to this day. Joachim Wtewael's thematic portrayals focused on mythological scenes and the idealized nude. While other Dutch artists evolved their work towards more naturalistic styles, Wtewael continued painting artificial scenery, using a vibrant colour palette, and filling his images with somewhat elegantly distorted figures and elongated bodies. Until his death in 1638, he created hundreds of works that are now located around the world, with some notable works in New York, Paris and Vienna.

1. Noortje Bakker and Laurens Bol, *Masters of Middelburg: exhibition in the honour of Laurens J. Bol* (Kunsthandel K. & V. Waterman B.V., 1984), 107-108.
2. Laurens Bol, *Goede onbekenden: hedendaagse herkenning en waardering van verscholen, voorbijgezien en onderschat talent* (Tableau, 1982), 53; Joaneath Spicer, *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age* (Yale University Press, 1997), 371.
3. Sam Segal and Michiel Roding, *De tulp en de kunst* (Waanders, 1994), 96.
4. Bol, *Goede onbekenden*, 53; Spicer, *Masters of Light*, 362.
5. Bakker and Bol, *Masters of Middelburg*, 107-108.
6. Jaap van der Veen, "Jacob Backer, een schets van zijn leven," in *Jacob Backer (1608/9-1651)*, ed. Peter van den Brink and Jaap van der Veen (Waanders Uitgevers, 2008), 12.
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32. Jamie Gabarrelli, "Cornelis Saftleven. A Young Man Seated on Ground" in *Drawing Closer. Four Hundred Years of Drawing from the RISD Museum*, 2022, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://publications.risdmuseum.org/drawing-closer-four-hundred-years-drawing-risd-museum/cat-36-cornelis-saftleven>.
33. Schulz, Cornelis Saftleven, 1607-1681, 4.
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<https://www.codart.nl/guide/agenda/antoni-waterloo-1609-1690-t-jkarcok/>.
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In Ruined Times.

Claes van Beresteyn (?), *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*

CATERINA GAMBIRASIO

The term *ruin* comes from the Latin *ruina*, signifying collapse, decay and degradation. In art, ruins became objects that encapsulated memories, evoking the passage of time. Artists depicted the solemn beauty of decay or, within Christian iconography, rebirth.

The notion of reflective nostalgia, the collective longing sentiment of remembering and returning home, is here linked to *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*. This essay explores the intersection of ruined landscapes and the artistic intentions of a Dutch seventeenth century artist. As will be shown, the artist, possibly Van Beresteyn, drew inspiration from actual landscapes, yet the meticulously crafted composition was equally shaped in the mind of the artist. The drawing is presented as an example of the interlacing of reality and imagination, a practise that can be traced through the reconstruction of experiences and techniques, thus offering a closer insight into the origins of the work, traditionally ascribed to this accomplished seventeenth century amateur artist.

Ruïns, Claes van Beresteyn, Castle Waardenburg, Passage of time, Re-birth, *Naer 't leven*, Artistic imagination



Claes van Beresteyn (?)

Ruins of Castle Waardenburg

1644-1684

Pen and brush in ink, grey wash, probably pencil

318 mm x 198 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-1463.¹

Condition:

Considerable foxing extended across the surface of the paper, several rusty spots on the left side of the paper, along with supposed oily smudges on the bottom left. The paper is overall in bad condition, in the top left ink marks and a dark brown smear are found, the most significant damage is in the sky on the left and over the still intact tower, where the paper appears lacerated. A new layer of paper is added on the verso as reinforcement.

Marks and inscriptions:

verso: Dr. A. WELCKER collection's mark on the bottom left.

recto: signed in the bottom left. 'C. Beres' (?)

Provenance:

sale Amsterdam (Brandt) 30 June 1942; Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam. Bought from Welcker for the Leiden collection in 1957.

The finely detailed scenery depicted in this drawing of the *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*, offers an immersive experience of a romantic natural landscape. The focal point of the composition is the castle, which stands wounded and abandoned while nature infiltrates every corner.

COMPOSITION, MATERIALITY AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL

The artist invested great effort into the construction of the building. On the darker side, where the sun doesn't reach, he used a grey wash to delineate the shadows, creating a very effective contrast with the lighter sections, where the cream colour of the paper enlightens the rubble. The use of a pencil and pen in ink is employed to delineate the most minute details, including the vegetation growing between the remnants of the dwelling, the cracks, and the few decorative elements still visible in the castle. The artist drew lines over the grey washed ink used as a base. Vertical lines darken the walls, with

shorter strokes in the proximity of the windows and angles. This technique not only enabled the artist to play with tone, but it also enhances a sense of tridimensionality, otherwise more or less absent due to the rather elementary perspective employed.

Next to this depiction of the ruined architecture, the other essential element in the drawing is the representation of nature, in particular the tree and the bushes visible in the foreground. These create a feeling of seclusion within the composition, giving a sense of entering a space enclosed by vegetation. The artist chose a much darker and more compact shade of ink for these elements; however, a closer look at the tree reveals the fine details used to create the light and the three-dimensionality of the image formed by the shadows. Also the patch of grass, with different types of plants set together in a realistic composition, demonstrates the delicate and detailed work this artist is capable of. However, when comparing the touch and technique of this section with the castle and the background

elements, it seems very well possible that these sections were created in two different periods, possibly by two different hands, with the grass and other vegetation only added later.²

Regarding the rather simple background, it conceals, in reality, a plethora of small subjects that bring life to the otherwise timeless landscape. Not only are two fishermen, in wash and black ink, standing on the right side of the castle, we can also see the loosely sketched outline of another building in the distance. On the left-hand side of the paper, a series of small elements decorate the water: ducks, swans, and other birds are the companions of a single small boat, in which three fishermen are seated, with two more companions on shore as well. Finally, a mountain seems to be rising, barely visible due to the light grey wash used, and the ageing of the materials. The function of the drawing may be deduced from all these elements: the signature, the decision to use ink – a permanent material – the care the artist put into the creation of the background, and the realistic tone, they all indicate to a final product, while the great effort put into creating a such complex composition suggests it was made for commercial purposes.

AUTHENTICITY AND ATTRIBUTION: COMPARISON TO BERESTEYN'S PRINTS AND DRAWINGS

The work, formerly attributed to the Dutch artist Claes van Beresteyn, has given rise to discourse surrounding its authenticity and attribution. Of particular interest is the signature located in the lower left corner of the drawing. Typically, this is the mark of the artist, however here it gives rise to ambiguity, as it appears different in other artworks. Varying between a simple monogram C VB, to a more complex one, in this drawing, it appears to be almost completely unreadable. On the original documentation left by the collector and previous owner Albertus

Welcker (1884-1957), interestingly enough, it is mentioned that the drawing was in fact sold at an auction in Amsterdam in June 1942, as by an 'anonymous artist', and was only later attributed to Beresteyn by Welcker. This collector seems to have exhibited a determination to attribute all anonymous drawings he collected over time, to the point that occasionally he himself signed the drawings with the name of an artist.³ This practice may have led to false attributions. Even if the authenticity of the signature remains uncertain, it is now believed that Beresteyn did not create this design, for it being too different from all of his other known artworks.

A comparison of this drawing with other artworks that are more firmly ascribed to him, reveals some interesting facts. Claes van Beresteyn is not among those renowned artists from the Dutch Golden Age. He worked and experimented as a draftsman, etcher and painter, but was considered an amateur. Only nine of Beresteyn's etchings are known to exist, the majority of which are signed and dated. It is noticeable how all of these are characterised by a focus on the representation of vegetation. Eight copies of these prints can be found in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, whereas the British Museum in London owns five of them, thus enabling – even when accounting for the differences in techniques – for a comparative evaluation with our drawing.⁴

In *Landscape with a horseman* (see Fig. 1) we see a forest, in which plants and trees dominate the scene, while the little horseman only occupies a small section in the centre.⁵ It is highly probable the etching was designed by Beresteyn. It is signed C. van Beresteyn and dated (1650) at the bottom of the page. The *Landscape with a horseman* was conceived as a print, however, it's challenging to believe that the same hand executed the Waardenburg castle. In the first example, it is noticeable how the artist

creates depth in the landscape by overlapping vegetative elements in an apparently chaotic manner. In contrast, the natural details in the castle's drawing are compact and limited to specific areas, which gives the design order and precision, whereas it lacks depth. The castle is rather flat, unlike the intricate, three-dimensional components visible in the design with the horseman. Indeed, it is the construction of the castle itself, which appears to be rather inexperienced, as if made by a beginner.



Figure 1. Claes van Beresteyn, *Boslandschap met een ruiter*, 1650, 198 x 212mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-BI-1058.

[https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Boslandschap-met-een-ruiter--6fa997cb3f40e16d67eddbf9f1c5be02?collectionSearchContext=Art&page=1&sortingType=Popularity&facets\[0\].id=872633d0b190c45b497abaa4921c748f&facets\[0\].nodeRelationType=HasPrimaryMaker&tab=data](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Boslandschap-met-een-ruiter--6fa997cb3f40e16d67eddbf9f1c5be02?collectionSearchContext=Art&page=1&sortingType=Popularity&facets[0].id=872633d0b190c45b497abaa4921c748f&facets[0].nodeRelationType=HasPrimaryMaker&tab=data).

There are further examples of Beresteyn's etchings for comparison, such as *Landscape with a group of oaks and a resting man*.⁶ The signature at the central bottom of the paper, the monogram C.v.B., suggests a certain paternity to Beresteyn. The almost perfectly squared print offers a composition analogous to the other naturalistic print, as it portrays a small landscape interwoven with vegetation, and a small figure of a man barely discernible among the trees. The most noticeable analogy is, furthermore, the distinctive style of the print's design,

especially the trees: the use of the lines, the sinuous shapes of the branches and canopies composition. The style is very similar to the one used for the vegetative elements in *Landscape with a Horseman*, suggesting the possibility of a shared origin.

These prints, however, bear little comparisons to *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*, which appears very different both in line and in the choice of landscape. Despite the initial similarities with the tree in the right-hand section of the drawing, upon closer inspection the vegetation in the drawing reveals a finer handling of line, resulting in an overall cleanliness of design. Despite all this, the shortage of information and artworks by Claes van Beresteyn makes it as of yet impossible to establish for certain whether the work is the result of an inexperienced hand or if he experimented with different styles. It remains a possibility that both the etchings and the drawing, *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*, are rightfully attributed to Beresteyn, but connected to different periods of his life. Nevertheless, for now the hypothesis that the work is simply the creation of a different artist remains the most plausible.

The same problem applies to the production of drawings. Giltaij noted that only three drawings are known to bear the signature of Beresteyn.⁷ One was formerly in the collection of E. A. van Beresteyn and now in a private collection, one is in the Stiftung Weimarer Klassik und Kunstsammlungen in Weimar, and the last example is preserved in the P.& N. de Boer Foundation in Amsterdam. Taking the first drawing as an example, in *Knotty old tree in the dunes with a fence* it is immediately noticeable how the lines resemble the sharp and dark marks of an etching's design instead of the usually softer strokes of a drawing.⁸ The design is once again elementary, the small naturalistic landscape, however, conveys a strong sense of depth thanks to the contrast between the dark

and rich black of the three in the foreground, and the almost grey background, a technique visible in the *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg*. It is, however, hard to connect the two drawings to the same hand, while in *Knotty old tree in the dunes with a fence*, the focus of the artist is reserved for the tree in the middle, and only a small number of birds in the sky decorate the scenery. In our drawing, other elements – such as the pond and the sky – are delicately crafted to create a more complex composition, and the natural elements are meticulously drawn, aiming for a realistic style.

RUINS AND A FASCINATION FOR ANTIQUITIES

Ruins and particularly those of ancient castles, are not rare to find in the Dutch golden age. On the contrary, it was a particularly popular subject among the artists from that period, for a number of reasons. Antiquities were, per se, a subject very commonly used, and more so among artists who travelled to Rome during their training stage. It is strongly believed that the subject depicted is Castle Waardenburg, situated near Haarlem. Another drawing of the same castle is known it's titled *Castle Waardenburg in Gelderland* (see Fig. 2) by Roelandt Savery (1576-1639).⁹ The drawing, which is of exceptionally high quality and executed in pen and wash, is currently kept in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. Despite the marked differences in style and technique when compared to the drawing, a notable detail merits attention: the view of the castle is from an opposite angle, yet the primary characteristics remain identifiable, suggesting the possibility that both works were, at least partially, made from life. The perfect composition of all the elements combined, however, may indicate that while



Figure 2. Roelandt Savery, *Castle Waardenburg in Gelderland*, 158 x 294 mm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Scotland, D1133.

the castle was drawn *naer 't leven*, that is after life, with small details added *uyt den gheest*, from imagination, to give the final work a more aesthetic and pleasant touch.

Drawings of castles are readily found, a particularly noteworthy example is that of Gerard Ter Borch II (1617-1681), whose remarkable series of sketches has survived and can be found in the *Landscape Sketchbook* at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The fiftieth page of this sketchbook shows the *Ruins of the Huis te Kleef*, a residence located near Haarlem that attracted the artist's attention.¹⁰ The features depicted in Ter Borch's drawing are readily identifiable, despite the experimental nature of the sketch, which was executed with delicate intertwined lines of black chalk. Together with Brederode Castle near Haarlem, arguably the most frequently depicted ruin in the Netherlands from the Golden Age, and despite its severe deterioration since the seventeenth century, it still exists. Among the vast selection of works featuring the Brederode castle, a significant one is conserved in The National Gallery Collection, in London, made by the Dutch painter Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709) in the second half of the century.¹¹ Even though the subject is different, the composition resembles our drawing: a castle gloriously stands on a hill surrounded by natural elements and some human figures. The landscape

most likely does not represent the real view, but the ruins of the dwelling were modelled to capture the aesthetic atmosphere of the ambient. It are such resemblances that indicate to strong conventions of portraying such ruins and the prevalent adding of elements *uyt den gheest*.

The drawing *Ruins of Castle Waardenburg* is a perfect example of the imaginative aspect of ruins: the castle serves as a monument, its walls evoke a narrative of wealth and grandeur, and the past remains visible in the

greatness of the dwelling. The decision to create a naturalistic landscape that remains largely untouched by the present era provides the drawing with a romantic sense of loss, yet the human presence, even if minute in comparison to the building and the background, infuses the composition with vitality and conveys to the viewer a tangible sense of the passage of time. And there, art on paper, the reflective nostalgia is drawn, the kind of nostalgia that aims at the longing, the remembrance from a great time evoked by the monument and emphasised by the decay.

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1. <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1547536>
 2. Hypothesis advanced by Drs. Jef Schaeps, curator Print & Drawings at the Leiden University Libraries.
 3. J. van Tatenhove, "De verzameling A. Welcker," *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 9 (1994): 121-156. The translation required to comprehend this article was kindly provided by Drs. Jef Schaeps, curator Print & Drawings at the Leiden University Libraries.
 4. E.A. van Beresteyn, Willem Frederik del Campo Hartman and Horst Gerson, *Genealogie van het geslacht van Beresteyn* 1941.
 5. Claes van Beresteyn, *Boslandschap met een ruiter*, 1650, Rijksmuseum Collection, RP-P-BI-1058.
 6. Claes van Beresteyn, *Landschap met een groep eiken en een rustende man*, 1653-1657, 199 x 217 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-BI-1061.
 7. Jeroen Giltaij, "The Drawings of Claes van Beresteyn and Adriaen Verboom", *Master Drawings* 55 (2017), no. 3: 320-321.
 8. Claes van Beresteyn, *Knotty Old Tree in the Dunes with a Fence*, pen and brown ink on paper, 150 x 130mm, private collection; see Giltaij, "The Drawings of Claes van Beresteyn", 320 and RKD: <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/284666>.
 9. Roelandt Savery, *Castle Waardenburg in Gelderland*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.
 10. Gerard Ter Borch II, *Ruïne van Huis ter Kleef bij Haarlem*, c.1634-1635, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-T1888-A-1797-50 (R).
 11. Meindert Hobbema, *The ruins of Brederode Castle*, 1671, The National Gallery, London, NG8

Karel van Mander's *Rape of Europa*

OLIVIA DAWE

Karel van Mander's drawing of the *Rape of Europa* (1589) vividly portrays the abduction of the titular figure, surrounded by a multitude of tritons and nereids originally absent from the Ovidian narrative. A re-examination of this richly detailed preparatory drawing and its other iterations provides insight into Van Mander's sources of inspiration, his compositional adjustments, and the spatial principles that he would later articulate in his *Schilder-Boeck*.

Karel van Mander, *Rape of Europa*, Drawing, Design, Mannerism, Haarlem Academy, Visual analysis



Karel van Mander

The Rape of Europa

1589

Pen and brown ink, black ink and grey wash

165 mm diameter

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-1050.¹

Watermark: double-headed eagle.

Provenance:

Auction sale (Amsler & Ruthard), 25/27 May 1908; Auction sale (Amsler & Ruthard), 5/7 June 1912; E. Bergson, London (Lugt 232b); Art dealer in Warsaw; Purchased there in 1936 by Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam; Purchased from him by Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences in 1956; purchased by Leiden University in 1957.

Literature:

Elisabeth Valentiner, *Karel van Mander als Maler* (J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1930), 126, 20, 109, 126, 137; A. Welcker. "Karel van Mander als ontwerper voor zilversmeden," *Oud-Holland* 88 (1953): 133; Helen Noë, *Carel van Mander en Italië: beschouwingen en notities naar aanleiding van zijn "Leven der dees-tijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders* (M. Nijhoff, 1954), 190-191; Marjolein Leesberg, "Goltzius, Karel van Manders 'Mecenas groot'," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 42/43 (1991-92): 424; Marjolein Leesberg, "Karel van Mander as a Painter," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 22 (1993-1994): 23-24; Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander, the Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* (Davaco, 1995), D36A, 129; *New Hollstein Karel van Mander*, no. 146, 166, see also xx, xxi; Jef Schaeps and Jaap van der Veen ed., *Leiden viert feest! Hoogtepunten uit een academische collectie* (Leiden University Press, 2014), no. 2.12, 62.

At the centre of Karel van Mander's auto-graph drawing, now in the collection of Leiden University, is a woman grasping the horn of the bull upon which she sits, her cape billowing in the wind. She is Europa, and the bull – a disguised Zeus – is abducting her, in this interpretation of a myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Tritons and nereids recline languidly in the foreground, while Neptune, standing on his seashell chariot, raises his trident in apparent fury toward the fleeing pair. The top third of the drawing depicts a landscape with a winding river cutting between rocky cliffs. At the crest of the scene, a loosely drawn Mercury flies overhead. At the bottom, Van Mander's signature and the date 1589 are inscribed.

TECHNIQUE

Van Mander uses brown ink to outline the many figures, their clothing, musculature, the wooded landscape, river, and distant cliffs. The abundant hair of the tritons, nereids, Neptune, and Europa is rendered with short, curved strokes. Quick lines define deep eye sockets – similar to those found in the works of Van Mander's contemporaries – as well as the contours, musculature, and joints of figures in various poses. Grey wash articulates shadowed areas. Van Mander alternates light and dark: sunlight from above Neptune's right illuminates the scene, while clouds behind Mercury cast a broad shadow over the river and distant mountains. The same dark wash surrounds the central couple, where concentric rings suggest ripples caused by the swimming bull, conveying

movement and distinguishing sea from land. To further suggest motion, Van Mander draws ripples in brown ink near the bull's front hooves – not as light effects, but as cues to the engraver. Similar strokes render the scale-like texture of the tritons' tails.

Black ink, likely added during a revision, is used to sharpen contours and add figures, enhancing clarity in a composition with numerous overlapping forms.² Unfinished elements attest to the drawing's preparatory nature. For instance, Neptune's chariot was repositioned; a revised prow outline appears above an earlier sketch. On the left, embracing figures were added after the shoreline, intersecting previous contours. The house just above them, left without wash, appears flat and visually disconnected from the composition.



Figure 1. Zacharias Dolendo, after Karel van Mander. *The Rape of Europa*, 1592, paper, 170 mm diameter, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-P-1892-A-17394. Image obtained from Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, accessed June 2, 2025, [https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/object/De-roof-van-Europa--22fb361f6b0c6bfd4eb5b0b455d3e07b?collectionSearchContext=Art&page=6&sortingType=Popularity&facets\[0\].id=b4cf1e2d5cb1b1aa782e62b43315517c&tab=data](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/object/De-roof-van-Europa--22fb361f6b0c6bfd4eb5b0b455d3e07b?collectionSearchContext=Art&page=6&sortingType=Popularity&facets[0].id=b4cf1e2d5cb1b1aa782e62b43315517c&tab=data).

RESOLVING COMPOSITIONAL PROBLEMS

This sheet is one of three drawings made in preparation for an engraving by Zacharias Dolendo, a pupil of Jacques de Gheyn II, and published in 1592 (see Fig. 1). The engraving, which exists in a single state, differs significantly in design, suggesting it was not wholly based on the Leiden drawing. The other two preparatory drawings are in Budapest (signed and dated 1589) and Dresden (unsigned, undated) (see Fig. 2).³ Together, the drawings and the print offer a layered view of Van Mander's working process.



Figure 2. Karel van Mander, *Die Entführung der Europa*, date unknown, pen and brown ink, blue wash, 160 mm diameter, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden, inv. C 1969-2. Image obtained from Kupferstich-Kabinett Dresden, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/882542>.

His repositioning of figures across versions suggests a compositional struggle.⁴ Neptune's placement in the Dresden sketch is revised in the two subsequent versions, then reintroduced in the engraving. The tritons and nereids in the Leiden and Budapest drawings are similarly positioned, prefiguring the *Schilder-boeck's* description of *coulisse* figures – used to guide the viewer's eye deeper into a composition.⁵ By

contrast, the Dresden sketch and the engraving each feature only one nereid-triton couple: bottom-right in the former and centre in the latter, shifting attention away from the titular couple more than in any other version. Connected to such repositioning is Van Mander's adjustment to the line of the horizon across versions. It is lowered in the Dresden sheet and the engraving, while raised in the Leiden and Budapest drawings. Van Mander's use of deep perspective relies heavily on the placement of the horizon, thus connecting the placement of the latter to his careful positioning of the various figures which occupy the scene.

These changes, along with shifts in their scale, provide rich insight into Van Mander's explorations of composition and overall design process. The substantial repositioning of foreground figures between the Leiden sketch and the engraving is notable for their suggestion of a further, now-lost design iteration. Most striking among these is the orientation of Neptune's spear: previously pointed at the couple, Dolendo's engraving depicts it angled downward. Such adjustments would not have been made by the engraver without Van Mander's consultation.

SPRANGER AND ZUCCHI

Specific elements of Van Mander's *Rape of Europa* directly reflect the influence of Bartholomeus Spranger, while the influence of the Roman artist Jacopo Zucchi has also been suggested and remains contested. Spranger's elongated, classically inspired figures with disproportionately small heads are evident in Van Mander's drawing. Such stylistic choices stand in contrast to those of Van Mander's Haarlem contemporary Hendrick Goltzius, which are of a more muscular style, as typified in the latter's series of gods after Polidoro da Caravaggio. The Sprangerian anatomy of the figures in the *Rape of Europa* can also be seen in Van

Mander's other *Metamorphoses*-inspired works from c.1585-1590, including the Uffizi Galleries' drawings *Apollo and Daphne* and *Pan and Syrinx*.⁶ Reznicek has also identified this in the dynamic poses of figures in Bremen's *Diana and Actaeon*. Zucchi was working on frescoes while both Spranger and Van Mander were in Rome. Of chief importance among these for its apparent similarities to the *Rape of Europa* is *The Allegory of Water* at the Palazzo di Firenze.

It is unclear whether Van Mander saw the fresco himself, a point complicated by Zucchi's notable absence from the *Schilder-boeck*.⁷ Leesberg does not completely refute that Spranger's *Neptune and Amphitrite*, inspired by Zucchi's fresco, may have served as an intermediary influence, while Elizabeth Valentiner entirely rejects this possibility.⁸ The latter is likely, as Van Mander's drawing borrows specific motifs from the fresco – such as its shaggy-haired tritons and the prominent spokes of Neptune's chariot – that are absent in Spranger's composition.

NEPTUNE, NEREIDS AND TRITONS

The *Rape of Europa* distinguishes itself through its deep perspective and stylized landscape, devices also present in two other round works made in the same time period: the engraving of *Perseus Freeing Andromeda* (1589) and the painting in the Frans Hals Museum, *The Deluge* (1587/88). Taken with *Apollo and Daphne*, *Pan and Syrinx* and *Diana and Actaeon*, this group of drawings demonstrate Van Mander's wielding of perspective to craft scenes designed for extended viewing.⁹

Ovid does not include Neptune, nereids, or tritons in his account of Europa's abduction. Whether their inclusion reflects inspiration from Zucchi or an attempt at Christian allegory, as argued by Leesberg in the case of Van Mander's addition of Minerva in *The Judgement of Midas*, remains in question.¹⁰

The inscriptions on the print do not suggest a Christian reading. Instead, the inclusion of Neptune may refer to the interconnectedness of the *Metamorphoses*' characters and storylines, which Van Mander knew intimately. Given that Neptune and Europa are linked through their son Polyphemus, the furious Neptune may suggest betrayal, an interpretation contrasting with Jef Schaeps' reading.¹¹

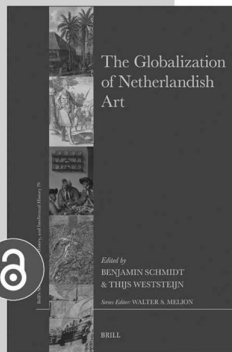
The provenance history of the drawing is confined to the twentieth century, and despite Leiden University's records extending only to 1912, further information can be found in the Hofstede de Groot fiches of the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD). The drawing comprises a part of Albert Welcker's collection which was acquired initially by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences and subsequently by Leiden University in 1957. Welcker's records, now a part of the Leiden collection, state that he had purchased the drawing from an unnamed art gallery in Warsaw in 1936. A collector's stamp bearing the name "Edward Bergson" in blue ink refers to a little known art collector whose drawings were dispersed in 1931, and from whom the Warsaw gallery may have acquired the drawing.¹² An inscription in English indicating the birth and death years of Van Mander points to an English collector, though with such little information available on the identity of Edward Bergson, it is impossible to ascribe it to him with certainty. The drawing was listed in the auction of the estate of Oscar von zur Mühlen of St. Petersburg in 1912. Barring an intermediary sale, Bergson may have purchased the drawing then. The same auction house

listed the drawing in 1908 upon the sale of the collection of "a Scandinavian art lover" with no further identifying information.¹³

The Rape of Europa was studied by Valentin, Miedema, Noë, Leesberg, and Leeftang in the context of Van Mander's *Metamorphoses*-inspired period. More recent scholarship has gained momentum following Emiel Reznicek's monograph on Goltzius, Miedema and Walter Melion's translations of the *Nederlandse Levens* and the *Grondt* respectively, and Cohen-Willner's research on the *Italiaanse Levens*.¹⁴

Karel van Mander's *Rape of Europa* thus represents a rich opportunity for analysis of artistic process. It is a transitional artwork both in terms of its material and stylistic qualities. An intermediate design drawing for the print ultimately engraved by Zacharias Dolendo, it is fertile ground for comparative analysis to other highly similar but contested drafts. Its date of creation – just prior to the beginning of Van Mander's collaboration with Goltzius in Haarlem, thus situates it as a significant representative of the artist's own style. The influence of Bartholomeus Spranger through Van Mander's extended limbs and small heads is suggested, but these idealized forms are placed into a composition that is constructed from the artist's concerns with nature as would later be expressed in the *Schilder-boeck*. In this way, the drawing becomes a space where invention, experimentation, and re-interpretation converge. It endures not only as a record of Van Mander's creative process, but as a vibrant echo of the artistic world he helped cultivate.

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1. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:1548421>
 2. I would like to thank Austėja Mackelaitė, curator of drawings at the Rijksmuseum, for first drawing this to my attention.
 3. Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, no. 1461, Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, no. C-1969-2. For the Budapest drawing, see Terez Gerzi, *Netherlandish Drawings in the Budapest Museum: Sixteenth-century drawings* (Van Gendt & Company, 1971), part 1, 59-60.
 4. This reflects Leeftang's view of the positive authenticity of the three drawings. Valentiner refutes the authenticity of the Budapest drawing, and Miedema doubts all three. See Leeftang, "Van ontwerp naar prent," *Delineavit et sculpsit* 27 (2003): 51; Elisabeth Valentiner, *Karel van Mander als Maler* (J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1930), 126 and Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander, the Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* (Davaco, 1995), D36A, 129.
 5. Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-boeck* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7. Shaping the Netherlandish canon : Karel van Mander's Schilder-boeck : Melion, Walter S : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive
 6. Marjolein Leesberg, "Karel van Mander as a Painter," *Simiolus* 22 (1993 - 1994), no. 1/2, 25; see also Helen Noë, *Karel van Mander en Italië: beschouwingen en notities naar aanleiding van zijn "Leven der deestijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders* (M. Nijhoff, 1954), 190; "Uffizi Galleries, Apollo and Daphne, inv. 8601 S; Uffizi Galleries, Pan and syrinx, inv. 8602 S.
 7. Saskia Cohen-Willner, *Rederijkersdromen en schildersdaden. De Italiaanse Levens in het Schilder-boeck (1604) van Karel van Mander* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2015), 74, UvA-DARE.
 8. Valentiner, *Karel van Mander als Maler*, 137; As remarked in correspondence with Leesberg.
 9. Emiel Reznicek and Ingrid Jost, *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius: mit einem beschreibenden Katalog* (Haentjes, Dekker & Gumbert 1961), 162; Kunsthalle Bremen, *Diana und Aktäon*, inv. 170 Z.
 10. Marjolein Leesberg, "Goltzius, Karel van Manders 'Mecenas groot,'" *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 42/43 (1991): 424.
 11. Karel van Mander, *Wtlegginge, en sin-ghevende verclaringe op den Metamorphosis Publij Ovidij Nasonis*, Haarlem, 1604, fol. 108v, accessed on DBNL; Jef Schaeps and Jaap van der Veen ed., *Leiden viert feest! Hoogtepunten uit een academische collectie* (Leiden Publications, 2014), 62.
 12. Fritz Lugt, "Edward Bergson," in *Les marques de collections de dessins & d'estampes, édition en ligne par la Fondation Custodia*, accessed 25 May, 2025.
 13. Amsler & Ruthardt, *Katalog einer reichhaltigen Sammlung von Handzeichnungen und Aquarellen berühmter Meister aller Schulen aus dem XV...; Versteigerung zu Berlin, Montag den 25. bis Mittwoch den 27. Mai 1908*, no. 322.
 14. For Miedema, see *The lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters*, 1994-1999; Leeftang, "Van ontwerp naar prent," 50-51; Walter S. Melion, *Karel van Mander and his Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting* (Brill, 2023).; all other sources as seen above.

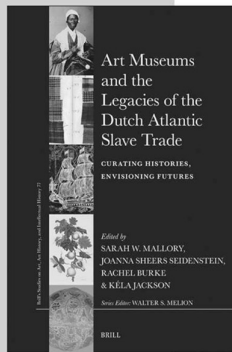


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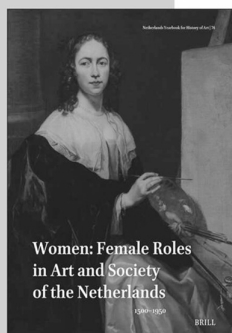


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BRILL

Jacob Backer, *Female Nude*

ZARA KEIJZER

This essay analyses Jacob Adriaensz. Backer's drawing, *Female Nude, Lying Down, Her Face Turned Away* (c. 1628-1651), a masterful study in black and white chalk on blue paper. The work is examined as a prime example of the 17th-century Dutch artistic ideal of *welstant*: the pursuit of beauty in form, structure, and posture. Through a carefully constructed, asymmetrical pose, Backer shifts focus from the model's identity to the idealized, sensual rendering of the human body, achieving this through soft, smooth modelling rather than using distinct and hard lines. The text argues the drawing functioned as a practice piece within the Amsterdam tradition of *Academiebeelden*, where artists collaborated in academic life-drawing sessions. This polished, sophisticated style is characteristic of Backer's oeuvre and distinguishes his circle from his contemporary, Rembrandt's, unidealized approach. The drawing is thus presented as a key example of academic idealism blended with meticulous life study.

Jacob (Adriaensz.) Backer, Nude drawing, Study, *Welstant*, *Academiebeelden*, Seventeenth-century



Jacob Adriaensz. Backer
Female nude, lying down, her face turned away
 ca. 1628-1651
 Black and white chalk on blue paper
 215 x 331 mm
 Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-2007.¹

Condition:

The recto shows many creases and frayed edges, possibly the result of the drawing whirling around in Backer's workshop, being picked up, used and put away numerous times. One crease is predominantly visible, running vertically down the centre, which suggests the paper may have been kept folded at some point. Numerous brownish-orange spots are also visible, perhaps indicating a decolorated residue. On the verso, the same central crease appears. There are two bright white spots, one in the upper middle of the paper and a larger one in the lower-left quadrant. Residue from older tape is visible in the top corners, with a triangular piece of tape in the bottom right corner.

Marks and annotations:

'NG' (embossed collector's mark of N.C. de Gijselaar); 'A. v. Velde' (cursive, written in pencil)

Provenance:

Gift of N.C. de Gijselaar, Leiden to the Prentenkabinet, Leiden University.

Literature:

Kurt Bauch, *Jakob Adriaensz. Backer: ein Rembrandtschüler aus Friesland* (De Gruyter & Co., 1926), 106, no. 51; K.G. Boon, *Radierungen von Rembrandt in Ingelheim am Rhein* (C.H. Boehringer, 1964), no. 5; J.W. von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck 1615-1660* (Menno Hertzberger & Co, 1965), no. D217 (as Govert Flinck); Judith Noorman, and David de Witt, *Rembrandt's Naked Truth. Drawing Nude Models in the Golden Age* (Museum Het Rembrandthuis, 2016).

In this drawing, Jacob Backer renders a female nude with masterful technique, using black and white chalk on blue paper to achieve a remarkable sense of three-dimensionality. The artist's handling of the material creates an overall soft and smooth sense that is visible across the form of the woman. Through the delicate placement of lighter and darker patches, Backer models the woman's curves, creating smooth transitions that emphasize the sensuality of the flesh without the need for cross hatching or ink. The result is a powerful study focused on the technical rendering of the human body.

FORM AND POSE

The woman is lying naked, her head turned down. There are no blemishes, marks or

anything else that could possibly help to identify her. Instead, we can see parts of her body, her flesh, the muscles of her arm, her soft stomach and voluptuous thighs. This is a very feminine and elegant body lying, almost draped, on some kind of pillowed underground. With her head bowed down, making her unrecognizable and her breast deliberately put down in the pillow and covered by her arm, the woman seems to want to 'turn away' from all openness.

The pose might suggest a kind of effortless-ness, but upon further, more detailed inquiry, we see that this woman is actually posing. In fact, this seemingly 'effortless-ness' pose - the little sideward stretch of the torso which causes the breast to lie squished on the bedding, while the pelvis is openly shown to us - would have been harder to maintain than it looks. The

woman's pose is asymmetrical: her upper body is closed off, face turned away, while at the same time the lower part of her body is regarded as being more 'open'. This discrepancy between upper body and lower body, asymmetrical and supposedly hard to maintain, does not appear to make the woman look unbalanced or uncomfortable at all. The pose only seems to enhance the focus on her belly and thigh-area. The woman is unrecognisable, but it is not about the individual woman. This drawing is about her pose and her body. Backer seems to focus on details and the careful examination of certain anatomical parts, such as her belly area and the crumpling of her breasts in this sustained pose.

TECHNIQUE AND ARTISTIC IDEALS

The manner of drawing, the pose, and the use of materials are all part of what can be described as *welstant*. The Instituut voor Nederlandse Taal (Institute for Dutch Language) issued for the 2019 'Rembrandt year' a online glossary for painters-jargon in the seventeenth century. *Welstant* here is defined as 'beauty of form, beauty of structure or posture'.² This definition is applicable to what Backer was trying to display.

Most of Backer's drawings after nude model, were made in black and white chalk on blue paper, a choice favoured by artists who paid special attention to modelling.³ The body of the woman has been sculpted in a smart manner through a mix of light and dark tones - her torso and upper leg area are lighter with some highlights, while her lower legs and underarms are rendered more monotone and darker. This again shows how Backer put the focus on the lower abdomen, thighs and buttocks. His patches of black chalk and white chalk in a playful manner accentuate and indeed seem to mold the woman's curves beautifully. Another giveaway as to the primary focus of

this study, is simply the fact that those body parts are drawn in the centre of the paper.

The lines marking the body are very soft and thin in some places, while robust and thick in others where shadows are indicated. The woman's left hand casts a deep shadow, clearly indicating that the supposed light source is to the front right. The fact that Backer managed to depict the softness of the woman's belly and breasts using only three colours (black, white and with use of the paper, blue) is an extraordinary accomplishment.

The primary intention of this drawing appears to be one of practice. With some certainty it can be stated that Backer probably did not mean for his academic drawings to be sold. Most of his drawings only entered the art market after his death and were, as is the case also with this drawing, not signed.⁴ This could be a telling indication that these drawings only functioned as studies after life and in some cases, as a study for a painting. There is no painting in Backer's known oeuvre that contains a female figure matching the one in this study. Given the fairly creased state of the drawing, it may be assumed that the drawing's purpose was purely that of practice.

This work fits within the tradition of *Academiebeelden*, as Arnold Houbraken praised them in the eighteenth century.⁵ By then, Backer's nudes had become collector items. The style of this draftsman holding nude drawing sessions can be described as academic, referring to these joint drawing session from life. The goal of such sessions was to collaborate as artists in organizing nude modelling sessions for practice and the production of finished works of art.⁶ It is said Backer usually focused on one figure, which we often now label as stylized or idealized, and where an emotion can seldom be recognized.⁷ The body is rendered as smooth, sensual and soft, which are aspects the circle of Amsterdam draftsmen making such academy drawings particularly



Figure 1. Jacob Adriaensz. Backer, *Weeping Woman Kneeling, Seen from Behind*, ca. 1634–38, black chalk, heightened with white on blue paper, 192 x 228 mm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 53.127.3. Image obtained from Jstor, accessed June 27, 2025, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.18672217>.

focused on. Their attention to detail resulted in remarkable drawings, that can be considered as idealized and perfected.

This particular study is very characteristic of Backer's broader approach to the drawing of figures. He predominantly shows a consistent preference for the use of the same material. There are portraits of women, not always nude, drawn in black and white chalk on blue paper, like The Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Weeping Woman Kneeling, Seen from Behind* (see Fig. 1). Also there, Backer's expertise is visible, adding very visible shadows in the drawing in a soft but striking manner. In his other nudes, we see once again that similar focus on idealized beauty over individual portraiture, with carefully

constructed poses designed to show the *welstant* of the body, as seen in *Seated Female Nude*, a drawing in the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Again, the female figure is there drawn in black, white and this time yellow chalk on blue paper, aligning it in idealisation as well as technique with his larger body of work. These drawings seem to have had the same function and are either general studies as such or drawings for specific figures on paintings.

This consistency in approach is also evident when comparing his work to that of his colleagues. Since the draftsmen of this group had to agree with each other on which models to choose, and how to position their models for each nude drawing session, it is no wonder that we find different drawings of the same subject that look eerily similar. This is for instance the case with Jacob van Loo's *Reclining Female Nude* also in the Special Collections of Leiden University (see Fig. 2), a drawing that previously was long ascribed to Jacob Backer.⁸ It is said that Rembrandt's drawings and etchings, as well as those of his pupils working with him concurrently, have little in common with the much more conventional and polished



Figure 2. Jacob van Loo, *Reclining female nude*, ca. 1634–1670, black chalk and white heightening on brown paper, 85 mm x 351 mm, Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, inv. PK-T-AW-287. Image obtained from Digital Collections Leiden University, accessed June 1, 2025, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1278043?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=b288932a4ca94f11fcbc&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0.

drawings after nude models that we know from his Amsterdam colleagues.⁹ People like Backer and Van Loo are meant by that term 'Amsterdam colleagues' and the terms 'conventional', 'polished' and 'sophisticated' are certainly apt for nude drawings drawn in this particular tradition, place and time.

RECEPTION AND LEGACY

The provenance of the drawing can be seen due to the collector's mark of N.C. de Gijselaar (the initials N.G. are embossed on the recto). Next to this mark, the words 'A. v. Velde' are written lightly in cursive pencil, referring to a previous attribution to Adriaen van de Velde that has long been contested. The drawing entered the Leiden collection from de Gijselaar's gift as a work by van de Velde, and the primary stamp on the verso is the collection's inventory stamp, with "Inv. 2007" written underneath. In 1942, the collector and scholar A. Welcker examined the drawing and suggested an attribution to Govaert Flinck, likely recognizing it was not a Van de Velde, due

to his owning an extensive body of work from Van de Velde himself. The change in attribution from Van de Velde to Jacob Backer, or Flinck to Backer has not been documented, though it is now described in the collection as a work by Backer for quite some time.

In conclusion, this drawing by Jacob Backer is a testament to a tradition of academically drawn and studied nudes, where the aesthetic ideals blended with the meticulous studying from life. The asymmetrical pose, with the averted gaze and strategically arranged body parts, directs the attention not to the model's identity, but to the soft and striking rendering of her curves and dips. Backer masterfully uses black and white chalk on blue paper and subtly plays with light and shadow to eventually achieve a smooth, sensual and idealized rendering of the body, which perfectly embodies the seventeenth-century Dutch ideal of *welstant*.

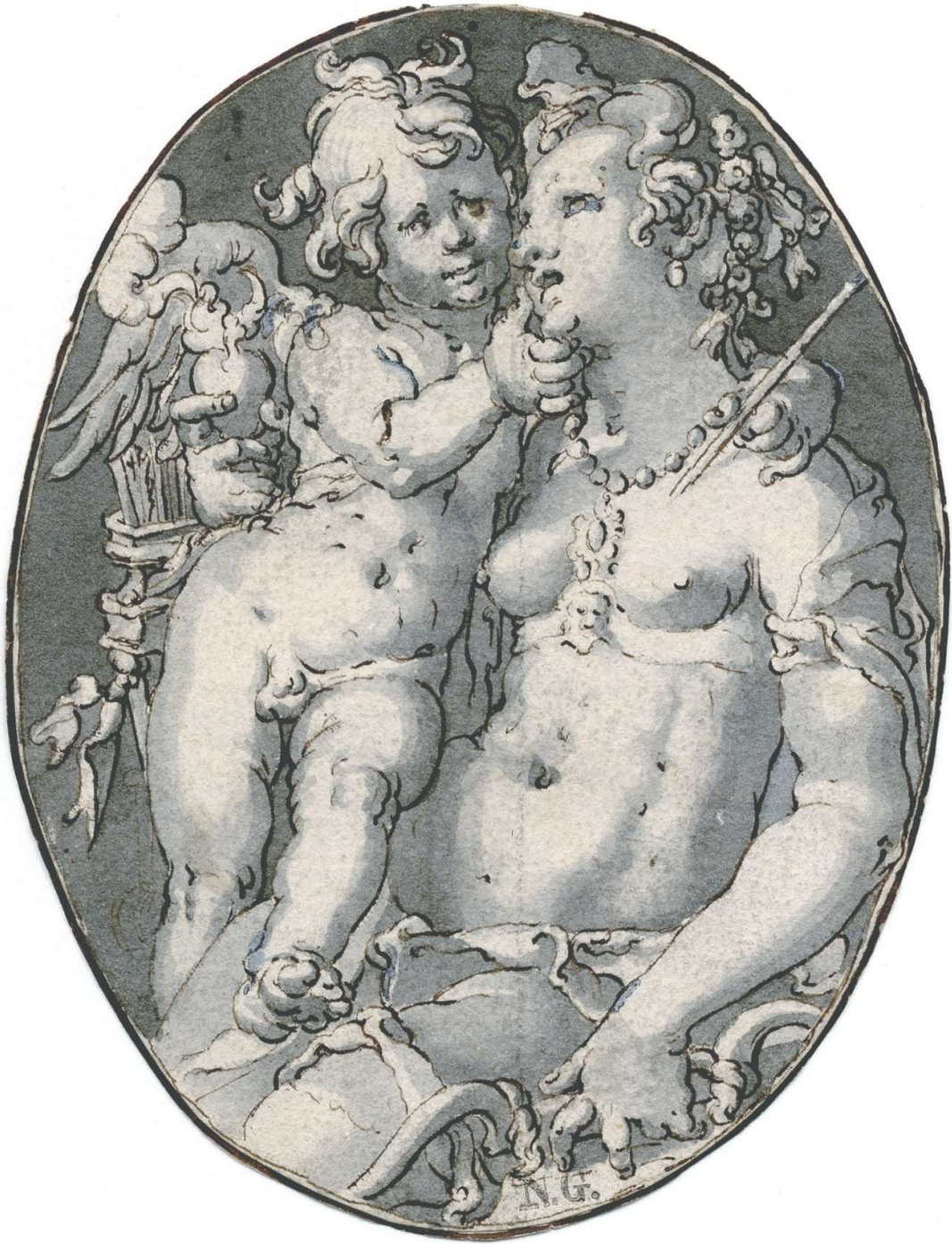
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1. Image obtained from Digital Collections Leiden University, accessed June 1, 2025, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1548986?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=2ab7db6eece4767a48af&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=6
 2. "Woorden voor Rembrandt," Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal, accessed May 21, 2025, <https://ivdnt.org/actueel/gelegenhedswoordenboekjes/woorden-voor-rembrandt/>.
 3. Noorman, "On Truth and Beauty," 40.
 4. Judith Noorman and David de Witt, "Rembrandt's colleagues in Amsterdam," in *Rembrandt's Naked Truth: Drawing Nude Models in The Golden Age*, ed. Judith Noorman and David de Witt (Museum Het Rembrandthuis, 2016), 132.
 5. Houbraken, "*De groote schouburgh*," 338. [Zeker hy heeft zyne Academiebeelden, inzonderheid de vrouwtjes zoo konstig op blaauw papier met zwart en wit kryt geteekent, dat hy daar door de kroon van alle zyne tydgenooten heeft weg gedragen].
 6. Noorman, "On Truth and Beauty," 36.
 7. "Jacob Adriaensz Backer (1608/09–1651): Rembrandts tegenpool," Codart, accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.codart.nl/guide/agenda/jacob-adriaensz-backer-1608-09-1651-rembrandts-tegenpool/>.
 8. Noorman, "On Truth and Beauty," 36.
 9. Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the female nude* (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 294.

Joachim Anthoniszoon Wtewael, *Venus and Cupid*

CAROLINE BIAŁY

This article discusses and analyses Joachim Wtewael's drawing *Venus and Cupid*, which is a remarkably detailed and skilfully shaped composition that was a study for a possible oil on copper painting. Wtewael often created preparatory studies to explore compositions, figures and details, yet the elaboration and refinement of this drawing raises questions about its purpose and artist's intent. Through an analysis and exploration of details, this piece connects the mythological representation of Venus and Cupid, with the representation of the nude. The elaborate nature of the work reveals the artistic process of creation and highlights how Joachim Wtewael engaged with mythological themes. *Venus and Cupid* is a study of working methods, showcasing Wtewael's reliance on drawing as a part of a broader creative process.

Mythology, Nude, Drawing, Joachim Wtewael, Study, Leiden University Collections, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen



Joachim Wtewael

Venus and Cupid

1590-1628

Pen in brown, grey wash, corrections in white

132 x 101 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-2471.¹

Marks and inscriptions:

recto: 'N.G.' stamp of the Nicolaas Cornelis de Gijselaar collection. On verso: stamp of the Prentenkabinet Leiden, inventory number 'Inv. 2471' in inscription.

Provenance:

Gift from Nicolaas Cornelis de Gijselaar to the Leiden University Collection.

Exhibitions:

James Clifton, Liesbeth M. Helmus, Arthur K. Wheelock ed., *Pleasure and Piety. The Art of Joachim Wtewael*, exh. cat., (Washington, National Gallery of Art, Utrecht, Centraal Museum, Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2015-2016), 55-56, fig. 7.

Literature:

J.J. de Gelder, *Honderd teekeningen van oude meesters in het Prentenkabinet der Rijks-Universiteit te Leiden* (W.L. & J. Brusse 1920), no. 9; James Clifton, Liesbeth M. Helmus, Arthur K. Wheelock ed., *Pleasure and Piety. The Art of Joachim Wtewael*, exh. cat., (Washington, National Gallery of Art, Utrecht, Centraal Museum, Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2015-2016), 55-56, fig. 7; Jef Schaeps ed., *For study and delight: drawings and prints from Leiden University* (Leiden Publications, 2016), 65, no. 2.15.

Joachim Wtewael portrayed *Venus and Cupid* in a strikingly elegant manner, in which he emphasized the gracefulness of the figure's bodies, while preserving the intimate nature of their portrayal. The elongated and delicate figures are contrasted with precision in the detailed curvilinear lines, which can be distinguished from the decorative hair and ornamentation of the clothes. The two figures are placed as if in a spiritual scene, where Cupid is gently pushing an arrow into Venus' chest in what seems to be an ecstatic experience. The depiction was created in pen and brown ink with the addition of a grey wash and the use of some highlights in white. The grey wash covering the background creates depth and volume, in that it provides a contrast with the highlighted, gently modelled figures. The lighter areas, present throughout the drawing, provide a focus onto the figures' bodies and faces. This technique establishes a three-

dimensionality, thus creating the appearance of volume in the bodies.

EMOTIONAL INTENSITY AND ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE

Joachim Wtewael captured *Venus and Cupid* in an intimate and emotional scene. The two figures are positioned closely, with Cupid standing on Venus' lap, creating a tender and sensual connection. He reaches behind her, pushing an arrow into her chest, while his other hand gently lifts her chin, guiding her into the moment of ecstatic experience. Cupid's small nude body reveals child-like characteristics, as his limbs and belly are round and plump, while his facial features and posture perhaps suggest a more mature, adult form. His expression is kind, gentle and caring, while his gaze is deeply focused on Venus and the act of evoking emotional intensity.

The goddess of love is sitting with her left arm relaxed on her leg and her right arm wrapped around Cupid. In her right hand she holds a burning heart, a symbol of all-consuming love.² Venus is portrayed almost nude, she is merely adorned with a jewellike ornamentation coiled around her neck and supporting her breasts. It extends into an empty pendant and ornamental head dangling in the middle. Some fabric is wrapped around her, barely covering her shoulders, legs and abdomen. The structure of the material is flowy, but with very deliberate folds and creases, similarly to the form of both the figure's hair, which is made up of rhythmic curvilinear lines.

Joachim Wtewael's drawing is characterized by a series of curved small and sharp lines, that in combination create an effect of decorative fragments. One of the focal points of the drawing are the curls on Venus and Cupid's heads, as they are distinctively spiral and thickly contoured, creating a playful contrast with the perfectly smooth skin



Figure 1. Joachim Wtewael, *Venus and Amor*. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, <https://www.boijmans.nl/collectie/kunstwerken/57956/venus-en-amor>.

of both figures' bodies.³ The lines here are thicker and more defined, possibly indicating the rapid movement of the artist's hand. In his work, Wtewael uses shading and highlighting to focus and accentuate the figures' attributes and call attention to important features. His depiction of Venus's breasts and belly emphasizes and idealizes her feminine features, by adding depth and a realistic, three-dimensional quality.

The artist's handling is characterised by his preference for these rich, plump figures with idealized curves, elongated proportions and beautifying techniques. In the drawing, Venus is portrayed as luscious and Cupid as plump, both figures depicted in an idealized and glamorous manner. Their facial expressions, however, appear to be more generalized, suggesting that the artist devoted less attention to perfecting them, than to mastering the detailing of their bodies. Venus's expression of ecstasy seems to announce that later and much more famous example of the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. In that Italian sculpture, the angel would hover above the saint, it is about to pierce her heart with a spear, consequently creating a spiritual experience of physical ecstasy, seemingly bordering on erotic pleasure.

MYTHOLOGY IN OIL ON COPPER

Joachim Wtewael, created many artworks referencing mythological subjects, while giving clever interpretations of these topics.⁴ An indication of this can be found in *Venus and Cupid*, in the way he captures and examines the figure's relation to one another. Wtewael often created several preliminary drawings for his paintings. An excellent example of such a preliminary drawing is *Perseus and Andromeda* in the Albertina Museum in Vienna.⁵ It was made in preparation of *Perseus rescuing Andromeda*, today in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.⁶ This shows the deliberate and thorough

execution of Joachim Wtewael's art, where he carefully outlined and prepared his works, navigating through different compositions and ways of thematic portrayal.

According to Schaeps, the drawing of *Venus and Cupid* is likely a preliminary study for a planned oil on copper painting, as Wtewael revisited and explored the theme further with two nearly identical compositions.⁷ The first study is part of the Leiden University Collections and the second, *Venus and Amor* (see Fig. 1) is kept in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (Inv. Nr MB 1920).⁸ Such preliminary studies allowed the artist to experiment with the drawing's arrangement, linework and portrayal of figures, before committing to the final form of the artwork. In the case of the Leiden *Venus and Cupid*, Joachim Wtewael studied the details, body configuration and decorative aspects, in which he altered a few elements. The figures in both these drawings are skilfully enclosed within an oval shape and defined by thicker contour lines, which perhaps indicated to the specific dimensions intended for the final painting. The composition is carefully aligned within the shape of the drawing, and the detailing, at times emphasized with bolder contours is clearly visible to allow further alterations or potential recreations. Wtewael often used the drawing technique as a preparatory step for his paintings, similarly *Venus and Cupid* is depicted with such detail and elaboration that it seems unlikely to have been intended to be only a drawing. However, the oil on copper painting was perhaps never executed or did not survive, as there are no known records of such an artwork.

Of the two, the Boijmans drawing depicting *Venus and Amor* (see Fig. 1), appears to be more of an elaborate sketch than a fully finished work, indicating that it was the first to be made, and therefore can be considered the original preliminary drawing. This is especially evident in the absence of white

highlighting, which is a key element used by Wtewael to enhance the luminosity and finish of the *Venus and Cupid* drawing.⁹ Additionally, the figures seem to be less refined, as the outlines of bodies are fainter, detailing is not as distinguishable, and the highlighted elements are not as illuminous and prominent. The contrast between the grey wash and figures' outlines is lacking depth, which when combined, these characteristics diminish the impact on the viewer, reducing clarity within the subject portraiture. The distinctions suggest that the Boijmans drawing represents the artist's original exploration of the theme, in which he tested the initial composition and detailing. In the work now in Leiden, he subsequently refined and perfected his technique, using different materials, which contributed to the final execution of his artistic vision.¹⁰ The detailing and precision were examined by Bleyerveld, who connected *Venus and Amor* to a possible execution of a copper painting.¹¹ Joachim Wtewael was perhaps experimenting with possible configurations, trying to create the best version for his finished work. Both drawings, portray the scene flawlessly, focusing on Venus' ecstatic experience and showcasing the elegant style of drawing. The work in Leiden, however, is unquestionably the more vibrant and accomplished from the two.

VULNERABILITY AND SENSUALITY

The theme of the nude is central to this depiction, as both represented figures in the drawing are portrayed nude, emphasizing vulnerability and sensuality of the human body. Joachim Wtewael depicted Venus and Cupid with great attention to detail, embracing female attributes and creating an intimate and erotic atmosphere within the couple. The body parts are drawn with extreme precision, in which the fluidity of the drawing, enhances the overall appeal of the artwork. The extravagance of the

decorative elements within the composition, contributes to the atmosphere of the scene and conveys a heightened sense of beauty and elegance. The idealism and glorification associated with the portrayal of mythological figures, allows for ultimate indulgence in the subject's depiction. In the case of *Venus and Cupid*, the erotization of the scene is paired with a centralization of the nude, resulting in a flawless and extraordinary appearance of Venus, emphasizing the divine.

Venus and Cupid is a second preliminary study for a potential oil copper painting by

Joachim Wtewael. The artist studied the decorative nature of the piece, playing around with light, contour and decorative elements, aiming at achieving the most ideal depiction. Wtewael portrayed both Venus and Cupid nude, enhancing their eroticism and sensuality, by idealizing and glorifying their bodies. Each element within the drawing is carefully placed. With the use of brown ink, he created an intimate scene, where Venus displays excitement, caused by the divine ecstasy of Cupid piercing her heart with an arrow. This oval portrayal is a clever and skilful use of space, where the figures are expressed gloriously.

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1. Image obtained from Venus and Cupid PK-T-2471 | Digital Collections.
 2. Schaeps, "For study and delight," 65.
 3. Schaeps "For study and delight," 65.
 4. Walter Liedtke, "The Golden Age by Joachim Wtewael," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 40 (2005), 93-104.
 5. Joachim Antonisz. Wtewael, *Perseus und Andromeda*, inv. 8133, Albertina, Sammlungen Online, accessed September 5, 2025, [https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumber-search=\[8133\]&showtype=record](https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumber-search=[8133]&showtype=record).
 6. Wtewael, Joachim, *Persée secourant Andromède*, inv. RF 1982 51, Collections Louvre, accessed September 5, 2025, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010063414>.
 7. Schaeps, "For study and delight," 65
 8. Schaeps, "For study and delight," 65.
 9. Schaeps, "For study and delight," 65.
 10. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. <https://www.boijmans.nl/collectie/kunstwerken/57956/venus-en-amor>
 11. Yvonne Bleyerveld, *Venus and Amor*. <https://www.boijmans.nl/collectie/kunstwerken/57956/venus-en-amor>.

Abraham Rutgers, *Riviergezicht*

PATRIZIA LUZI

This essay focuses on *Riviergezicht*, a drawing in the Special Collection of Leiden University by the amateur draftsman Abraham Rutgers. Executed in red chalk, signed and dated 1680, the drawing shows a river view with a building on the far bank, trees of varying shape and size on either side of the building, and a small rowing boat that appears to be moving slowly along the river. It strikes the viewer with its balanced and naturalistic composition, its suggestive atmospheric effects, and its temporality, that manages to capture the present. The essay calls attention to the technique, the function, and the aesthetic quality of the drawing, and shows how it can be considered as a significant example of seventeenth-century drawing 'from life', which aims to reproduce as faithfully as possible a place that the artist knew and was familiar with.

Abraham Rutgers, Seventeenth-century, Landscape drawing, Drawing 'from life'



Abraham Rutgers

Riviergezicht

1680

Red chalk

101 x 198 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK–T–AW–59.¹

Marks and inscriptions:

Verso bottom left: 'Ab.^m Rutgers fecit, c.^r A.^o 1680'

Also the marks of collectors Hofstede de Groot (L. 561); Albert Welcker (L. 6243); Max von Heyl zu Herrnsheim (L.2879).

Provenance:

M. von Heyl zu Herrnsheim; his sale 25 May 1903, no 268; sold to C. Hofstede de Groot; his sale in Leipzig (Boerner) 4 November 1931, no. 211; sold for DM 8 to A. Welcker, Amsterdam; purchased from him in 1957 by Leiden University.

Literature:

Felix Becker, *Handzeichnungen holländischen Meister aus der Sammlung Dr. C. Hofstede de Groot im Haag: fünfzig ausgewählte Zeichnungen Rembrandts, seines Kreises und seiner Zeit* (Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1923), I, nr. 45; Luuk Pijl, *Van Cuyt tot Rembrandt: de verzameling Cornelis Hofstede de Groot* (Snoeck, 2005), no. 75, 232-33.

Abraham Rutgers's *Riviergezicht* is a study from nature, and a very particular one at that, as it seeks to depict not only visible objects – trees, buildings, a boat, people – but also the more intangible nature of things, especially the light that creates reflections in the water, and the wind that gives gentle movement to the trees. We see a river view, wherein a building sits on the far bank. The building, perhaps a farmhouse or a barn-like construction, appears to be slightly tilted to the right, giving it an aged effect. There are trees of varying shapes and sizes on either side of the building and in front of it. The leaves of the trees appear to have movement, blown by a light wind, and this is particularly visible in the row of small trees seen in front of the building. Both the building and the trees are reflected in the water, which has a clear surface sheen, giving clarity to the reflections. A small rowing boat moves slowly along the river, leaving a gentle swell in the water. The silhouette of a small village can be seen in the background, to both sides of the building.

MATERIAL AND TECHNIQUE USED TO STUDY FROM LIFE

The drawing is signed in the verso and dated 1680. It is executed in red chalk, an iron-oxide pigment that contains clay and other mineral compounds, which was widely used by artists. It was available in sticks that could be sharpened, meaning they were convenient to use and easily transportable. Artists appreciated the material for the quality of its color and for the broad range of visual effects that could be achieved with it. As a highly versatile medium, it allows for subtle tonal variations, just by wetting it or by applying different levels of pressure, qualities that would have been appreciated by Rutgers. In his *Riviergezicht*, we see that he used a sometimes wet chalk, applied with more or less pressure, to render the difference between the real objects, their reflection in the water, and to create special effects and differentiate middle ground from foreground and background. Moreover, red chalk is a medium that can easily be blended to model forms and to achieve atmospheric effects,

which evidently appealed Rutgers as well. Noteworthy is the way the artist blended the shape of the trees' leaves to render the effect of the wind blowing through them.

Riviergezicht is a beautiful example of a study from life, which seeks to understand, rather than simply reproduce, the observed reality. The drawing aims to study the reflection of the objects in the water and to understand the nature of reflected light. Moreover, it seeks to catch the essence of the wind, an invisible atmospheric phenomenon that Rutgers managed to make visible in his drawing. In the seventeenth century, drawing was a means of recording and studying the world, and study drawings were very common. They were executed not only by professional artists, but also by amateur draughtsmen like Rutgers, who was a textile merchant by profession. The high degree of finish, the signature, and the date on the verso of the drawing suggest that *Riviergezicht* was produced as an autonomous work of art.



Figure 1. Abraham Rutgers, *Dike on a River*, 1686-87, brown ink and brown wash over black chalk, Maida and George Abrams Collection, Boston, Long term loan to the Harvard Art Museum, 1.2018.284. Image obtained from J. Sheers Seidenstein and S. Anderson eds., *Crossroad. Drawing the Dutch Landscape* (Harvard Art Museum, 2022), 79.

Rutgers's drawings are stylistically characterized by compositions that strike the viewer for their pronounced prospective effects, achieved by the use of diagonal or circular lines. An interesting example of this innovative and original way to shape



Figure 2. Abraham Rutgers, *A River view with a figure looking out over a wall, houses and windmills beyond*, brown ink and brown wash, traces of black and red chalk, 113 x 208 mm, Private Collection J. A. M. Smit. Image obtained from RKD images, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://rkd.nl/images/290557>.

compositions is *Dike on a River* (see Fig. 1) a drawing executed in pen and brown ink, and brown wash from the Maida and George Abrams Collection in Boston.² The drawing shows a river flanked by a dike, which dramatically arches into the distance, creating a heightened sense of space and perspective. Another peculiarity of Rutgers's works lies in the fact that they often depict scenes taken from the same area, which becomes apparent when comparing *Dike on a River* to another drawing, *River view with a figure* (see Fig. 2), which appears to show the same scene but taken from another angle. A study of a Rutgers's album of landscapes that is at Museum Huis van Gijn in Dordrecht has shown that many drawings depict places in the vicinity of Utrecht and the river Vecht, where he may have owned a country house in Nieuw Maarsseveen.³ Furthermore, Rutgers's drawings are characterized by the presence of narrative scenes that are identical or very similar, such as the rowing boat with the two men in *Riviergezicht* and in *River view with a figure*, or the figure of a man taken from behind that is to be seen in *Dike on a River* and *River view with a figure*. This figure indicates the vantage point from which the scene was viewed, suggesting the idea that the drawing was done on the spot.

When compared, *Riviergezicht*, *Dike on a River* and *River view with a figure* reveal some

differences and similarities that are worth underlining. *Riviergezicht* is spatially very different from the other two drawings: its composition is characterized by horizontal rather than diagonal or circular lines, and three perspective planes are clearly discernible. A sense of space and perspective is mainly achieved by scaling and by blending the objects. The composition is overall very well balanced, it communicates a profound sense of calm, and seems much more harmonious than the other two drawings. On the same hand, *Riviergezicht* does show some similarities to *River view with a figure*, as there are some resemblances in the river landscape. The two drawings might depict the same place, but from a different perspective, as often happened in Rutgers's works.

Riviergezicht is a drawing that was probably made outside and later completed by the artist in his studio, as revealed by the scene

of the rowing boat that is exactly the reverse of the one that we can find in *River view with a figure*. Like many of Rutgers' drawings, it aims to reproduce as faithfully as possible a place that, in all likelihood, is on the River Vecht, one the artist knew and was familiar with. It is striking in its balanced and natural composition, its suggestive atmospheric effects, and its temporality that managed to catch the present moment as such. Today, it can be perceived as a "beautiful" work in the Kantian sense of the word, done to arouse "a free play of imagination and understanding." When the drawing left the Max von Heyl zu Herrnsheim collection and was sold at auction in Stuttgart in 1903, it was described in the auction catalog as "Zart ausgeführte Rotstiftzeichnungen von schöner Wirkung" ("a delicately executed red pencil drawing of beautiful effect").⁴

1. Image obtained from Leiden University Digital Collections, accessed June 24, 2025, <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1549114>.

2. See P. Sutton and W. Robinson, *Drawings by Rembrandt, his student and circle from the Maida and Georg Abram Collection* (Yale University Press, 2011), no. 58.

3. See J. M. Niemeijer, "Varia Topografica IV: Een album met Utrechtse gezichten door Abraham Rutgers," *Oud- Holland* 79 (1964): 128; Onno van Seggelen, "Abraham Rutgers (Amsterdam 1632-1699) De Rommelpott van Hoorn," accessed June 11, 2025, Abraham Rutgers (Amsterdam, 1632 - 1699) De Rommelpott van Hoorn - Drawings and watercolours - Catalogue.

4. *Handzeichnungen Alter und Neuer Meister*, Versteigerung zu Stuttgart, 25 und 26 Mai 1903, no. 268.

Antonie Waterloo, *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*

TERESA C. R. CARVALHEIRA

In *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*, Antonie Waterloo gives a fair impression of a landscape drawn *near het leven*, showcasing an artistic interpretation of the natural scenery on blue paper. The work however seems to lean on that of Jan Ruycher, who's prints were owned and re-worked by Waterloo. By examining different views of the same landscape by Antoine Waterloo and Jan Ruycher in both drawing and print, the reader is invited to look at the artistic appreciation of the natural Dutch landscape in the seventeenth century and at the way some artists made use of each other's work.

Antonie Waterloo, Jan Ruycher, Landscape drawing, Dutch landscape, Seventeenth century, Artistic reworkings on paper



Antonie Waterloo

View of Rhenen, seen from the west

1650

Black chalk and grey wash on blue paper

145 x 244 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-723.

Condition:

Fairly good condition, some small, yellowish spots visible on verso. Additionally, the verso exhibits a white residue of probably glue. The left side of the drawing seems abraded, cutting off part of the windmill on that side of the sheet.

Marks and inscriptions:

Verso: stamp of the collector Dr. A. Welker, in a greyish tint, along with the inventory number of the same collection, written in black ink: 723. Also, the verso shows a forged signature of Jan Ruyscher in the handwriting of A. Welcker, and "Rheenen" (pencil)

Provenance:

Sale Amsterdam (Muller), 16 October 1928 (No. 498), as Simon de Vlieger, sold for f. 12.50 to Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam. In 1957, purchased from him by the Print Room, Leiden University.

Literature:

A. Welcker, "Johannes Ruyscher alias Jonge Hercules", *Oud Holland* 50 (1933), 118-131, fig. 22; Eduard Trautscholdt, "Johannes Ruyscher alias Jonge Hercules. Die Radierungen" in *Hercules Seghers*, ed. E. Haverkamp Begemann (Scheltema & Holkema, 1973), no. Tr15; Christiaan Schuckman, *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700. Antoni Waterloo*, vol. 50, ed. D. de Hoop Scheffer (Sound & Vision Interactive, 1997), 90.

The *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*, is a captivating drawing. It depicts a bird's-eye view of the city of Rhenen, showing a small city with an impressive church tower and two windmills. The city is surrounded by flat, expansive fields that extend to the distant horizon, with trees, bushes, and fences. In it, a human figure appears to be walking along a path, carrying something on its head. The drawing features a vast sky with clouds. Waterloo's use of black chalk to quickly sketch lines that represent the city's buildings along with plants, trees, and grass in the surrounding fields, is a testament to his skill. He used black chalk to add details, such as the human figure and grey wash was applied for detailed shading and creating depth. The perspective appears to position the observer at a higher vantage point, offering a view of the entire city and surrounding landscape from a distance.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEWS AFTER LIFE OR PRINTED EXAMPLES

This bird's-eye view, a defining feature in Dutch seventeenth-century drawings, reflects the period's fascination with landscape representations. From the sixteenth century onwards, Dutch artists showed a keen interest in depicting landscapes, whether real or imaginary, evocative or recognisable, including scenes of cities, villages, and countryside. This drawing demonstrates the artist's appreciation for natural scenery and serves as a prime example of landscape drawing. It seems to have been created from direct observation, that is to have been done *naer 't leven*, suggesting that the artist would have visited the location and sketched the view and its elements. Notably, the *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*, features elements such as prominent, recognisable buildings, including the tower of the distinct Cunera church, part of the fifteenth-century

Gothic structure dedicated to Saint Cunera, and the two windmills on the left. However, the drawing bears a resemblance to the work of Jan Ruyscher (c. 1625-after 1675), as for instance his *View of Rhenen* (see Fig. 1).¹ Indeed, upon closer scrutiny, it seems that *View of Rhenen, seen from the west* was indeed based on the work of Jan Ruyscher, very possibly his etching of a *Landschap met een gezicht op Rhenen* (see Fig. 2).²



Figure 1. Jan Ruyscher, with reworkings by Anthonie Waterloo, *View of Rhenen*, 1674-1690, etching, burin and drypoint, 120 x 210 mm (plate). Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-2017-P-71.

This would suggest Waterloo executed the drawing not *naer 't leven*, despite all appearances. Ruyscher's *Landschap met een gezicht op Rhenen* and Waterloo depict the same view, perspective, and details, such as the human figure, the surrounding flat fields, and the clouds in the sky. However, both works also reveal some differences, such as the size of the human figure, the figure is larger in the drawing, as well as discrepancies in the church tower and fields. These differences may be better understood by examining them further.

JAN RUYSCHER AND WATERLOO

One could of course assume the drawing in Leiden was also made by Ruyscher. Yet, among all known works on paper by Jan Ruyscher, none were done on blue paper. For Waterloo however, several works on blue paper have been identified, along with drawings using a grey wash to create a gloomy atmosphere. The Scottish National Gallery holds a drawing ascribed to Waterloo, that depicts the same view of Rhenen

from a different angle.³ The artist employed the same black chalk and grey wash to craft all elements as otherwise seen in the Leiden drawing. Also, the same city of Rhenen is seen, with its distinctive church tower, windmills, and surrounding fields. From the new vantage point that is depicted here though, the canal and its opposite bank are visible, along with the broad flat field and several other buildings. Anthonie Waterloo was indeed a well-travelled landscape draftsman renowned for bird's-eye views. Yet, there is documented evidence suggesting that Waterloo purchased, reworked, and sometimes republished works by other artists under his own name.⁴

It seems plausible that perhaps *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*, served in itself as an example for further prints, including the *Small View of Rhenen*, the *Panorama of the city of Rhenen*, or the *View of Rhenen*. All these prints were published by Waterloo, all bear his initials in the print address: AW. ex., and furthermore, all these prints bear a technical resemblance, as being etchings with dry point added.⁵



Figure 2. Jan Ruyscher, *Landschap met een gezicht op Rhenen*, etching printed on lightbrown prepared paper, 72 x 209 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-844.

In face of all these similar works and closely related works, what can be asserted is that as a reworking of a Jan Ruyscher design, Anthonie Waterloo's *View of Rhenen, seen from the west*, possesses the ability to transcend

conventional categorisation, inhabiting a liminal space that oscillates between realism and fantasy.

1. Jan Ruyscher, with reworkings by Anthonie Waterloo, *View of Rhenen*, 1674-1690, etching, burin and drypoint, 120 x 210 mm (plate), Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-2017-P-71.

2. Jan Ruyscher (born circa 1625, in Franeker) was a Dutch draftsman, painter, and etcher, possibly the son of Johann Rauscher II. Likely active within Rembrandt's circle during the 1640s, his landscapes show influences from Rembrandt's pupils, such as Koninck and Furnerius, as well as Hercules Segers, which earned him the nickname 'Young Hercules'. Between 1649 and 1657, he lived in Dordrecht, where he produced his earliest etchings and married Cornelia Sabout. Appointed to the court at Cleves in 1652, Ruyscher later worked for the Electors of Brandenburg (1657-1661) and Saxony (1661-1675). He died in Dresden around 1674-1675.

3. Anthonie Waterloo, *View of Rhenen*, 303 x 439 mm, black chalk and some grey wash on paper, Scottish National Gallery Of Modern Art (Modern Two) (Print Room), National Galleries of Scotland collection, D 1183.

4. The British Museum, "Anthonie Waterloo", <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG50422>.

5. See *Small View of Rhenen*, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1963.30.34187; *Panorama of the city of Rhenen*, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 4060 / 3969 B; *View of Rhenen*, The Harvard Art Museums, R1050.

Fishermen drawing in the nets by Jacob Esselens

ANNE VAN WAART

This essay examines *Fishermen drawing in the nets* by the amateur artist Jacob Esselens (1626/1627-1687) from the Leiden University collections. The drawing can be considered a preparatory study for a near identical drawing in the Rijksmuseum: *Riviergezicht met vissers*. However, Esselens' oeuvre shows no evidence of similar preparatory drawings. Additionally, such a practice would seem rather time consuming for an artist who mostly sold sketches. In order to understand why Esselens created two versions of the same composition, the Leiden drawing was studied on basis of style and technique. Additionally, it was compared to other stylistically similar drawings in his oeuvre. Results showed that the drawing displays several technical inconsistencies, such as the use of different ink colours. These inconsistencies do not appear in his other works. The Leiden drawing may therefore have simply been an unsatisfactory drawing that Esselens later recreated, rather than a premeditated study.

Dutch genre drawing, Jacob Esselens, Landscape drawing, Seventeenth-century Dutch drawings, Draftsmanship, Black chalk, Pen and ink



Jacob Esselens

Fishermen drawing in the nets

1636-1687

Black chalk, pen and black and brown ink and brush in grey ink on paper

298 x 185 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-1195.¹

Condition:

overall in good condition. Some moisture damage in the top left corner and traces of tape and glue on reverse.

Marks and annotations:

recto: none; verso: traces of an erased inscription in pencil in top middle left: '.....Roos'.² Bottom left corner: Albert Welcker collection mark (L.2793c) in blue with "inv. no. 1195"; "Inv. no. N'2066"; and (in pencil) "50".

Watermarks:

Strasbourg bend with countermark WC DC, similar to Churchhill 430.

Provenance:

Collection Goll van Frankenstein (N2066), auction (De Vries/ Roos), Amsterdam, July 1, 1833; Collection Jacob de Vos, auction (De Vries/Roos), Amsterdam, October 30, 1833; Collection J. de Vos, auction (Roos/Muller ea), Amsterdam, May 22, 1883; collection P. Langerhuizen, auction (F. Muller), Amsterdam, April 29, 1919; collection A.W.M. Mensing, sale (F. Muller), Amsterdam, April 27, 1937; sold for f.70 to Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam; purchased from him by the Leiden University Print Room in 1957.

Exhibitions:

De Verzameling van Dr. A. Welcker, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, 14 April 1956-13 May 1956.

Literature:

L.C.J. Frerichs (with a preface by J.Q. van Regteren Altena), *De Verzameling van Dr. A. Welcker. Nederlandse tekeningen der zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* ('s Rijksprentenkabinet Amsterdam 1956.

Marine, river and idyllic pastoral scenes appear to have been a favourite within Jacob Esselens' oeuvre. This black chalk and ink drawing of *Fishermen drawing in the nets* displays these beloved subjects. It shows a riverside landscape rich in greenery. Sail- and riverboats are strewn across the river. A well-dressed woman and her son are watching the fishermen pull in a boat from the water, as others are selling their catch between the trees. A more elaborate version of the same composition, *Riviergezicht met vissers*, is in the Rijksmuseum collection (see Fig. 1). It has been supposed the Leiden drawing may have functioned as its preparatory sketch. There are, however, no other known examples of similar preparatory

sketches by Esselens.³ This begs the question as to why he chose to recreate the drawing. Little literature exist on Esselens' habits as an amateur artist, yet the drawing itself may offer new insight into Esselens' artistic workflow.

WORKING PRACTISES

Esselens mainly used black chalk and ink to create the Leiden drawing. He started by setting out the composition with black chalk, after which he added further details with ink. He applied different colours and techniques to achieve a variety of effects. First, he drew the tree, boat and men in the

foreground in brown and black ink with pen. Subsequently, with brown ink and a small brush, he added contours to the figures and to add grass. Finally, he used a bigger brush and grey ink in varying shades of darkness, to add tone and volume, helping to achieve atmospheric perspective. Besides adding washes he also with the tip of his brush created flicks of tone suggesting the presence of leaves. The light grey washes and lack of pen lines in the background create a softness that contrasts to the dense detail of the foreground. His use of different materials provides visual variety, making the drawing more interesting to look at.



Figure 1. Jacob Esselens, *Riviergezicht met vissers*, 1636-1687, brush in grey ink, pen in brown ink and black chalk on paper, 196 x 316 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1884-A-309. Image obtained from Rijksmuseum, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200127589>.

One interesting aspect of the drawing is indeed Esselens' use of different ink colours. The man, boat and grass in the bottom right corner are drawn with a vivid brown ink. The switch to the dark ink for the rest of the composition is very abrupt and does not seem to make much stylistic sense. An explanation can be that he worked from right to left when applying the ink. Assuming he was righthanded, this would make sense as it prevents the wet ink from smudging. He may have been unhappy with the colour of the ink and switched to a different one in the middle of drawing. Another fact that supports his dissatisfaction is that the

redrawn version in the Rijksmuseum uses the dark brown ink throughout. Additionally, the use of different colours in this way is rare within his oeuvre.⁴

That Esselens was primarily a landscapist is very evident when we look at this drawing. Esselens draws the environment with great confidence, but his figures do not always look as successful. He seems to find ease with abstracting the shapes and lines that make up the foliage, but struggles to stylize the figures. They either tend to look too cartoonish or too detailed. This is especially evident in the way he draws faces. Some of the men appear to have more realistic proportions, while others' are more exaggerated. Esselens likely drew the environment from memory, but used models for the group of figures. Esselens drew plenty from life during his travels and sketched a lot of river scenes. While it has been suggested that the river depicted is the Thames, a lack of topographical markers makes this hard to confirm.⁵ Additionally, Esselens would have had the experience to draw a simple landscape like this without aid. For his figures, however, he is known to have used references. An example is a drawing by him of a man *naar 't leven*, that reappears in multiple of his paintings.⁶

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

Esselens oeuvre includes many stylistically similar drawings, but there are few that are also similar in their use of materials. The majority are either made solely with black chalk and grey washes or completely sketched out with pen and ink.⁷ The drawing that bears most resemblance in technique, is *Haven buiten een stadsmuur* in the collection of the Teylers museum (see Fig. 2). While this drawing places less focus on the figures and looks a bit less elaborate, it also shows pen and ink used in a similar more restrictive manner.

The Rijksmuseum drawing, on the other hand, shows more resemblance to his other works in its use of materials. The use of black chalk and grey washes to indicate foliage, as seen in the Rijksmuseum drawing, is in fact quite common. This may have been something he picked up from professional artists like Simon de Vlieger and Anthonie Waterloo.⁸ Like Esselens both artists utilized the textures of the black chalk to indicate trees and foliage. They also all used grey washes to indicate further details, form and shadows. Esselens' work has occasionally been wrongly attributed to one of these two artists.⁹ Further stylistic similarities to other artists can be noticed in his wider oeuvre. As Esselens is believed to be self-taught, he may have learnt drawing by copying his contemporaries.



Figure 2. Jacob Esselens, *Haven buiten een stadsmuur*, undated, pen in brown, brush in grey and black ink and graphite on paper, 190 x 283 mm, Haarlem, Teylers Museum, inv. Q 067. Image obtained from Teylers Museum, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://teylers.adlibhosting.com/ais6/Details/museum/35658>.

THE WORKFLOW AND HABITS OF AN AMATEUR ARTIST

In order to gain further understanding of Esselens workflow and habits as an amateur artist, it is also important to study other aspects of his works. Most importantly his signing habits may offer more insight into his commercial intentions. Overall, it appears that Esselens was rather inconsistent in what drawings he signed. Some very sketchy drawings have a signature, such as

the Teylers' drawing, while some highly elaborate ones do not.¹⁰ This complicates our understanding of the function of these drawings: did he intend these drawings for the market from their conception or was this a decision he made later? The latter appears to have been the case on few occasions, such as with the Teyler's drawing which bears the signature "J. Esselens".¹¹ Another common signature is "J.E.", which appears on the Leiden drawing and one from the British Museum.¹² An explanation for his signing habits, may be that he decided which sketches to sign and sell after completing a bunch. Alternatively, he may have signed drawings after they were sold, explaining why some elaborate ones remain unsigned. It is even plausible that not all signatures were placed by Esselens himself.¹³

This all is, however, hard to determine as little is actually known about his artistic business practices.

A signed drawing that is of particular interest is one from the collection of the National Museum in Stockholm, *River Landscape with boats and an excursion party*. This drawing is made in black chalk and black ink.¹⁴ Its composition is very similar to the Leiden drawing.¹⁵ It has the big tree on the right, the river in the middle and the hill in the background. It also shows a party at leisure in the foreground and boats and fishermen. Stylistically, however, this drawing seems

more sketchy. Yet, like many other sketches the drawing bears his signature. This makes Esselens' decision to redraw the Leiden drawing quite peculiar as he presumably sold sketches of lesser finish too.

Additionally, the only other preparatory drawings known by him are very different in technique and were drawn as part of a project.¹⁶ It is rather unlikely that creating detailed preparatory sketches like the

Leiden drawing was a common habit of Esselens. Not just due to the lack of evidence, but also because it does not seem to fit into his workflow as an amateur. Majority of his oeuvre exists out of sketches and quick drawings, adding the extra step of meticulous ink and chalk studies would take time he likely did not have as he had to focus on his mercantile work too. Therefore, the elaborate Rijksmuseum drawing may simply exist because he was unhappy with how the Leiden one turned out. Perhaps because of the way his figures looked or the differences in the colour of the ink. These are after all the instances where he made the biggest changes. He may have been pleased with the overall composition, yet knowing he could execute it better he decided to redraw it entirely. Its function as a preparatory sketch may thus have been entirely accidental.

While Esselens was mostly considered a landscape artist, as seen he also repeatedly included genre elements. He seemed to have favoured more idyllic and pastoral scenes. This genre was popular in the seventeenth century. Society had largely become focused on cities in this time and thus city folk started to romanticize countryside life. In these genre drawings wealthy townspeople are contrasted with the local peasantry. These drawings are thus not necessarily a completely realistic depiction of life, but more an idealized version of it. However, the way Esselens has composed the scene is very quiet and serene. One can imagine they are there sitting by the river looking at the fishermen doing their work as others quietly watch. It paints a very realistic picture in that way, it is not exaggerated for comedic purpose. All is just as it is and as such a realistic example of an amateur genre drawing.

1. Image obtained from Leiden University Library Digital Collections, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:1276222> (accessed May 31, 2025)
2. This is likely a faded reference to auction house De Vries, Brondgeest & Roos.
3. Information kindly provided by Vera Hendriks, email contact, May 27 2025. Vera Hendriks works at the Teylers museum and has done research on Esselens drawings for Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem, which will be published in 2026 in *Master Drawings*. She mentioned that Esselens made several preparatory sketches for this project. These are, however, very different in style and material use from the Leiden sketch. A reason she gives for these differences is that they were made as part of a larger project. An example of a finished drawing for Atlas Blaeu and its study sketch are: Jacob Esselens, *Die Themse in Richtung Westminster und Whitehall*, 1660, pen in black, black chalk and grey wash on paper, 34 x 36 cm, Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. In Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem, Bd. 19:33, f.36 (33). ÖNB Digital, accessed June 1 2025: <https://onb.digital/result/10B8C1D1> and Jacob Esselens, *View of Westminster from London*, late 17th-century, pen and brown ink with brush and brown wash over graphite on cream antique laid paper, 21.2 x 38.7 cm, Bonston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 21.2551. MFA Boston, accessed June 1 2025, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/238487/view-of-westminster-from-london?ctx=953e3f80-6157-49ba-9681-60c645fd8f39&idx=0>.
4. As for the colour of the ink, Esselens did combine different colours in other drawings. However, he would either use the same colour for each compositional element, that being the figures in this case, or use a darker ink to add details. One example is *Gezicht op Leiden* at Teylers, in which the landscape is drawn in brown ink, but the boats and figures are done in black. The abrupt change in *Fishermen drawing in the nets* is not seen in any other work. The change may also be caused by degradation of the ink. Small dots in the same rusty colour can be seen in other spots throughout the drawing. See: Jacob Esselens, *Gezicht op Leiden*, after 1667, pen in brown, pen in black and brush in grey, 196 x 448 mm, Haarlem, Teylers museum, inv. Q064. Teylers online catalogue, accessed June 1, 2025, <https://teylers.adlibhosting.com/ais6/Details/museum/35654>.
5. L.C.J. Frerichs (with a preface by J.Q. van Regteren Altena), *De Verzameling van Dr. A. Welcker. Nederlandse tekeningen der zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* ('s Rijksprentenkabinet Amsterdam 1956), 21-22.
6. Sturla Jonasson Gudlaugsson, "Een Figuurstudie Van Jacob Esselens Te Besançon," *Oud-Holland* 66, no. 1 (1951): 62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42722930>.
7. See: Jacob Esselens, *Landingsplaat van schuiten*, 1636-1687, brush in grey, pen in brown and black ink and black chalk on paper, 157 x 131 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1898-A-3543. Rijksmuseum online collection, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200127607>.
8. Hind and Popham, *Catalogue of Dutch and Flemish*, 84; Christiaan P. van Eeghen "Simon de Vlieger as a Draftsman, III: His Chalk Landscapes and Their Connections with Works by Anthonie Waterloo and Others," *Master Drawings* 53, no. 3 (2015): 313.
9. Van Eeghen, "Simon de Vlieger," 323.
10. Compare the following two drawings as examples, Jacob Esselens, *River Landscape with Boats and an Excursion Party*, undated, black chalk and grey wash on paper, 23,5 x 35,1 cm, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. NMH 16/1912. Nationalmuseum, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://collection.nationalmuseum.se/en/collection/item/216225/>; Jacob Esselens, "1895,0915.1152", undated, black chalk and grey wash on paper, 183 x 265 mm, London, British Museum, inv. 1895,0915.1152. British Museum online collection, accessed May 31, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0915-1152.
11. Michael Christiaan Plomp and Leslie Schwartz, *The Dutch drawings in the Teyler Museum* (Davaco Snoeck-Ducaju en Zoon, 1997), 145.
12. John Charles Robinson, *Descriptive Catalogue of Drawings by the Old Masters: Forming the Collection of John Malcolm of Poltalloch, Esq.* (Chiswick Press, 1876), 221.
13. Vera Hendriks, "Jacob Esselens: de tekenaar die ook handelde. Het getekende oeuvre van een zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse kunstenaar", Master thesis, (Universiteit Utrecht, 2022). In her thesis Hendriks studied the signatures on 29 of Esselens' drawings and discovered only twenty were signed by him.
14. Börje Magnusson, *Dutch Drawings in Swedish Public Collections* (Hatje Cantz; Nationalmuseum, 2018), image 151.
15. Jacob Esselens, *River Landscape with Boats and an Excursion Party*.
16. Vera Hendriks, email contact, May 27 2025.

Isaack van Ostade, *Ballad-singers on a bridge* (verso: *Sowing Peasant*)

JARUI FENG

Isaack van Ostade's *Ballad-singers on a Bridge* marks a key moment in his artistic development, as he moved beyond his brother Adriaen's interiors toward open-air, narrative scenes. Executed in ink and watercolour, the drawing combines genre and landscape with theatrical detail and subtle satire. Its lively composition and rare subject of a village ballad performance reflect van Ostade's emerging pictorial voice during his brief but productive career.

Isaack van Ostade, Dutch Golden Age, Adriaen van Ostade, Genre scene



Isaack van Ostade

ca. 1639 – 1645

Ballad-singers on a bridge (verso: *Sowing Peasant*)

Pen and brown ink, watercolour over black chalk on paper (verso: pencil)

195 x 308 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-1953-T-10¹

Marks and inscriptions:

Recto folio: signed at the lower right: 'I V Ostade' (pen and brown ink); unidentified collector's mark at the lower left corner;

Verso folio: lower middle: 'I V Ostade' (by a later hand; pencil); collector's mark in the middle: 'R.P.K.L.'; notes in pencil

Watermark: Baslerstab with crown

Provenance:

Sale Amsterdam, January 1772, no. 689; A.W.M. Mensing, Amsterdam; auction sale Amsterdam (Mensing), April 27, 1937, no. 515; Rosenberg; on loan from the Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen since 1953; transferred by the Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen on December 23, 1959

Exhibitions:

Hollandische Zeichnungen des 17. Jahrhunderts in Ingelheim am Rhein, Ingelheim am Rhein (Berufsschule), April 18-May 3, 1964, no. 59; Pieter Biesboer, Martina Sitt and Marvin Altner ed., *Satire en vermaak: schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw: het genrestuk van Frans Hals en zijn tijdgenoten 1610-1670*, Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum, September 20, 2003-January 6, 2004, 174.

Literature:

Bernhard Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen* (Hauswedell), 1981, no. 410; Elmar Kolfin, "Isaac van Ostade 1621-1649: De Nieuwsbrengrers" in *Leiden viert feest! Hoogtepunten uit een academische collectie*, Jef Schaepe and Jaap van der Veen ed. (Leiden University Press, 2014), no. 18.

This lively and detailed drawing by Isaack van Ostade vividly captures a gathering of peasants animated by a public performance. The scene centres on two ballad-singers standing on the parapet of a stone bridge. One figure appears to read or sing from a broadsheet, his mouth open in dramatic declamation, while the other hands a copy to a nearby onlooker. The popularity of their performance is without doubt: they attract a large group of peasants, with men and women, young and old, each responding differently to the central spectacle. Two elderly men are seated on the bridge; several women standing near the centre seem to be discussing among themselves. A child climbs a tree for a better view, while another sits casually on the edge of the bridge. This diversity of reaction adds a dynamic

sense of realism and movement to the scene. Behind the crowd, a village unfolds: houses line the road, numerous pedestrians pass by, and flags fly from the church tower and rooftops, indicating that the scene likely takes place during a fair or annual market.

TECHNIQUE AND EXECUTION

Executed in pen and brown ink over black chalk with selective touches of watercolour, the drawing showcases a sophisticated and layered technique. The underlying black chalk, particularly visible around the two central figures on the bridge, provides a loose compositional structure. Over this, van Ostade adds linework in brown ink to define contours and enrich details. Tonal

variation is achieved through fine hatching and subtle ink dilution, especially in the garments, foliage, and surfaces of the bridge. Selective touches of watercolour bring life to the scene without overwhelming the drawing's graphic clarity, not only enhancing garments and animating natural elements, but also introducing a sense of atmospheric unity. However, the drawing is not without signs of artistic immaturity: the lines often appear hesitant and searching, particularly in a succession of short, broken lines used to describe drapery, which lack the structural crispness one might expect in a more mature work.²

Although many drawings in the Dutch Golden Age served as preparatory studies for works in other media, this sheet appears to have been conceived as an independent work. No related painting or print by Isaack van Ostade is known, and the carefully applied watercolour, together with the signature, suggests a level of finish uncommon in purely functional studies. The verso, which bears a loosely sketched figure of a sowing peasant, supports the idea that the sheet was used at least in part for exploratory or informal practice. It also points to van Ostade's habit of reusing paper, or possibly that this sheet was once part of a sketchbook.³ It is plausible that the drawing began as a casual compositional exercise, but the artist, evidently pleased with the result, chose to sign it and perhaps preserve it as a finished piece. Notably, a painting by Jan Miense Molenaer (see Fig. 1) features a composition strikingly similar to this drawing, including the bridge, ballad-singers, and arrangement of spectators.

However, the dating of both works remains uncertain. Schnackenburg dated the drawing to before 1639, during Isaack's

apprenticeship under his brother Adriaen, and argued that it was based on Molenaer's painting, whose precise dating he left unresolved.⁴ In contrast, the exhibition catalogue *Satire en vermaak* assigns both works to the early 1640s and similarly concludes that the drawing derived from the painting.⁵ Dennis Weller likewise treats the painting as the prototype. However, other publications, including *Jan Miense Molenaer. Painter of the Dutch Golden Age* and the *Leiden viert feest!* catalogue, maintain that the drawing predates Molenaer's painting and may have served as its model.⁶ As scholars continue to debate the dating of both works, it remains difficult to determine whether Molenaer's painting served as a model for van Ostade's drawing or vice versa.



Figure 1. Jan Miense Molenaer, *Itinerant Hawkers at a Fair*, 1640-1645, oil on panel, 46 x 69 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. 946. Image obtained from Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/863138/fahrende-h%C3%A4ndler-auf-einem-jahrmarkt?language=de&question=Jan+Miense+Molenaer&limit=15&sort=relevance&controls=none&objidx=3>.

CARVING OUT A ROLE OF HIS OWN

It is certain that this drawing was created during a formative moment in Isaack van Ostade's brief but productive career. At this early stage, Isaack was still under the influence of Adriaen, whose interior tavern scenes and caricatured figures served as a point of departure. Isaack's early works

often borrow compositional strategies and figure types from Adriaen's oeuvre, and in some cases direct models can be traced.⁷ However, *Ballad-Singers on a Bridge* shows Isaack beginning to chart an independent course. Notably, he relocates genre action from the dim tavern interior to open-air rural settings: village streets, bridges, fairs, populated by more naturalistic and sympathetically observed figures. His draftsmanship reveals an early commitment to narrative and atmosphere over caricature.

Interestingly, the motif of the ballad-singer does not traditionally belong to the standard repertoire of subjects associated with peasant fairs in seventeenth-century Dutch art. While bustling village scenes, tavern brawls, and merry gathering were well-established motifs, depictions focused specifically on these oral performers remain notably scarce. This thematic choice likely reflects a personal preference of Isaack van Ostade, who seems to have found narrative and compositional potential in such scenes. Indeed, he returned to the subject more than once.⁸

A notable comparison is a drawing now in the collection of the British Museum (see Fig. 2), which also centres on a village crowd gathered to hear a speaker raised on a barrel. While both drawings feature van Ostade's preference of combining landscape with genre elements, the British Museum sheet presents a more loosely structured composition, and the line work is more rhythmic and fluid. The figures are dispersed across a calm, tree-lined backdrop, and the overall mood leans toward gentle observation, an approach more typical of Isaack's later works, as he gradually moved toward more serene landscape scenes.⁹ The overall tonality is noticeably

darker, marked by strong contrasts between light and shadow, and its brown palette echoes the reddish-brown hues often used by Adriaen.¹⁰ In contrast, *Ballad-Singers on a Bridge* is more theatrically constructed, and its bright and colourful watercolour are already characteristic of Isaack's own mature palette in the early 1640s, distinguishing his evolving style from his brother's.¹¹

CHOREOGRAPHED THEATRICS VS. REALITY

Although rooted in everyday rural life, the drawing's carefully choreographed theatrics lend it a narrative character bordering on fantasy. The scene is structured like a stage, and these two men are not singers as we understand today. They are itinerant performers, who travelled from village to village sharing news, songs, and moral tale, as such providing an important source of both information and entertainment in seventeenth-century Dutch rural society. A jug placed on the ground might hint at their reliance on alms. In a humorous and morally charged detail, a couple at the lower left is so captivated by the singers that they fail to notice a child reaching into the man's purse.



Figure 2. Isaack van Ostade, *Ballad-singer at a Village Fair*, 1636-1649, pen and brown ink, with watercolour, 164 x 262 mm. London, British Museum, inv. Oo,10.167. Image obtained from British Museum, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Oo-10-167.

One of the elderly men on the bridge seems to notice it, though, as he points towards the action with his mouth wide open. A commotion is about to happen. Theft is a familiar motif in Dutch genre scenes used to illustrate folly and distraction and offers a satirical commentary on the stupidity of the villagers who craved sensational news. Such lively crowd scenes, where bystanders are duped by their gullibility, are common in genre scenes.¹² In this way, the drawing reflects a fantasy of village life itself: a vision shaped not by peasants, but by artists and collectors drawn to the rural world as a site of comic relief, moral commentary, and narrative charm.

The drawing has a well-documented provenance, beginning with an auction in Amsterdam in 1772. It later entered the collection of A.W.M. Mensing, a prominent Dutch collector and dealer, before passing through the Rosenberg collection. Since 1953, it has been on loan from the Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen and was formally transferred to the Leiden University Libraries in 1959. While definitive documentation is lacking, it is widely believed that the Rosenberg collection in this context refers to Saemy Rosenberg and his brothers, Raphael and Siegfried—Jewish art dealers who fled Germany following Hitler's rise to power. They established the firm NV Internationale Antiquiteitenhandel in Amsterdam, but were forced to leave the

Netherlands between 1937 and 1939 due to increasing Nazi persecution. This connection is further supported by a 2005 restitution claim submitted by the Rosenberg heirs, which sought the return of several works from the Netherlands Art Property Collection (NK collection), including a painting by Isaack van Ostade that was lost during the war.¹³ Although no direct claim has been made regarding this particular drawing, its provenance suggests it may share a similar history.

Isaack van Ostade's *Ballad-singers on a Bridge* offers more than a charming scene of rustic festivity, as it reveals the artist's evolving approach to narrative, space, and character. It occupies a transitional moment in van Ostade's career as he moves away from Adriaen's interiors toward his own preference for blending genre and landscape. His use of a sophisticated, layered technique demonstrates a growing command of drawing techniques and also signals Isaack's increasing independence from his brother's stylistic influence. Notably, the motif of the ballad-singer stands out as a rare and personal subject choice, departing from the typical imagery of peasant fairs. At once documentary and dramatic, the drawing stands as a visual fantasy shaped by the artist's imagination and subtle moral commentary.

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1. Image obtained from Leiden University Libraries, accessed June 24, 2025, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1549532?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=25f918b5814ac9d2ca04&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0.
 2. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*. (Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1981). 48.
 3. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 50.
 4. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 48.
 5. Pieter Biesboer, Martina Sitt and Marvin Altner ed., *Satire en vermaak: schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw: het genrestuk van Frans Hals en zijn tijdgenoten 1610-1670* (Waanders, 2003), 174.
 6. See Dennis P. Weller, *Jan Miense Molenaer. Painter of the Dutch Golden Age* (Raleigh, NC., North Carolina Museum of Art, 2002), 160; Jef Schaeps and Jaap van der Veen ed., *Leiden viert feest! Hoogtepunten uit een academische collectie* (Leiden University Press, 2014), 56.
 7. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 47.
 8. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, nos 416, 425.
 9. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 52.
 10. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 35.
 11. Schnackenburg, *Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle: Gesamtdarstellung mit Werkkatalogen*, 49.
 12. Weller, *Jan Miense Molenaer. Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, 160.
 13. "Rosenbaum (B) – Restitutiecommissie," Restitutions Committee, accessed June 25, 2025, <https://www.restitutiecommissie.nl/en/recommendation/rosenbaum-b/>.

Cornelis Saftleven, *Camel*

THIRZA VAN ROOIJEN

The research is based on the drawing *Camel* (1646) by Cornelis Saftleven. The study was executed in black chalk with grey-brown wash. The drawing is of a Bactrian camel, with careful anatomical details and attention to texture, as it captures both the animal's body and its expressive character. As a way of situating the drawing within the artist's oeuvre, Saftleven's developing practice is examined, and the transition from making copies to drawn studies "from life" is discussed. Saftleven frequently signed animal studies for sale, treating them as completed works of art. Comparisons to artists such as David Teniers II and Roelant Savery highlight Saftleven's distinctive style, combining composition and naturalistic observation. In the end, *Camel* is a prime example of Saftleven's skill at combining artistic imagination with empirical precision, giving the exotic subject a very realistic and subtly narrative appearance.

Cornelis Saftleven, Drawing, Bactrian camel, Seventeenth-century, Exotic animal studies, From life



Cornelis Saftleven

Camel

1646

Black chalk, grey and brown wash on white paper.

190 x 252 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-303.¹

Condition:

Overall in fine condition; verso has some glue residue on outer edges.

Marks and inscriptions:

Recto: monogrammed and dated between the legs of the camel: CS 1646 (black chalk), that is the initials of Cornelis Saftleven and date (1646).

Watermark:

A cross and two crossing sickles.

Provenance:

R.E. Graves, his sale, London, 25 June 1923, no. 49; sold to C. Hofstede de Groot, The Hague, his sale Leipzig (Boerner), 4 November 1931, no. 219; sold to Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam; purchased from him in 1957.

Literature:

Luuk Pijl, *Van Cuyp Tot Rembrandt: de verzameling Cornelis Hofstede de Groot* (Snoeck, 2005), no. 78; William Schulz, *Cornelis Saftleven, 1607–1681: Leben und Werke. Mit einem kritischen Katalog der Gemälde und Zeichnungen* (De Gruyter, 1978), 59; Jef Schaeps ed., *For Study and Delight: Drawings and Prints from Leiden University* (Leiden University Press, 2016), 244.

The drawing depicts a Bactrian camel, with exaggerated, stylised features, particularly in the thick mane around its neck. The camel stands on uneven ground, its gaze turned to the left, but slightly towards the viewer, as if it had just been disturbed. It is rendered in monochromatic tones, with sharp attention to texture and shading. Particularly striking is the animal's face, which seems almost anthropomorphic in its expression. With one lip raised, the camel appears to chew. The animal's posture, the wild mane, the large black eyes, and the slightly crooked underside are well observed and well captured by the artist.

DRAWING ANIMALS

Saftleven kept the background empty and minimised the details of the ground. Between the legs of the camel, the artist has monogrammed "CS", standing for Cornelis Saftleven, followed by "1646", the year it

was possibly drawn. The camel is drawn in black chalk with layers of grey and brown wash, creating an image that carries a quiet depth. Saftleven almost always drew with black chalk and mainly used white drawing paper, often combining the chalk with a brush and grey ink.² In this drawing, however, the wash seems intentional. Saftleven used different strokes for different parts of the body. For the long fur, he used energetic strokes, which give the camel a kind of wild dignity. His humps and the rest of the body have been drawn with less lively and a lighter wash, creating the suggestion of softer fur. The chalk outlines establish the form with clarity, while the smooth, fluid washes create shadows and textures that bring the animal to life. Saftleven was exceptionally skilled at this balance of structure and spontaneity.

Early on in Saftleven's career, he demonstrated an interest in drawing animals, creating sheets filled with pets, birds, and

unusual specimens.³ Many of his animal drawings at that time were studies of other works (*naer het werck*), like those of Roelant Savery.⁴ This period is characterised by drawings that mainly served as exercises to gain a deeper understanding of animal forms and their anatomy. A good example of this is his study of a bear (c. 1626), which is kept in the British Museum in London (see Fig. 1). In this drawing, Saftleven demonstrates his care for the texture, build, and physical essence of a bear. The red and black chalk on ink washes provides a warm, natural feeling to the bear's fur. The pose chosen here is static, yet calculated. However, while the bear appears very detailed, the lines are drawn more haphazardly with a loose application of cross-hatching. The shading remains somewhat unfinished, particularly around the bear's limbs and paws or around its bear skin. It suggests that this drawing is more an unfinished study than a complete work of art. This is in contrast to *Camel*, which shows a more deliberate



Figure 1. Cornelis Saftleven, *Study of a bear*, 1623-1681, black chalk, with red chalk, pen and brown ink and grey wash, 283 x 295 mm, London, The British Museum, inv. 1836,0811.505. Image obtained from the British Museum, accessed May 20, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1836-0811-505.

attention to detail, used to enhance the animal's character. The drawing of the camel appears more finished and intentional, with more realistic anatomical information. As such, it announces a change in Saftleven's style, which occurred later in his career.

It was after 1644, that Saftleven underwent an apparent change in his method. He began to draw his animals more often *naer het leven* (from life), which means he observed them directly rather than copying them from other works.⁵ This shift led to a more accurate representation of anatomy and greater realistic detail. This is evident in his drawing of the *Camel*, which should be seen as an independent work of art. The inspiration for this particular drawing may have come from Saftleven's encounter with the menagerie at the court of Stadtholder Frederick Henry. The latter had received a camel from the Shah of Persia, a rare animal in the Netherlands at the time, and had consequently commissioned multiple works from Saftleven.⁶ The status of the *Camel* as an independent work of art rather than a study as such, is further confirmed by the fact that Saftleven signed the drawing with his monogram. He distinguished his finished works from his loose sketches by signing only the finished pieces, which he often sold to collectors, reinforcing the notion that the *Camel* was intended for sale.⁷ This is in line with a growing seventeenth-century practice, whereby drawings served not only as preparatory sketches but also as fully-fledged works of art in their own right, also known as *papierconst* and often collected by lovers of drawings.⁸

Saftleven seems to have been captivated by camels or dromedaries and made more drawings of them. Other examples are *Four Dromedaries* (1600 – 1699), *Standing Dromedary Facing left* (n.d.), and *Camel* (1646).⁹ The latter is indeed an interesting comparative example, as it is also a Bactrian camel, serving the same function but with a slightly different execution (see Fig. 2). Here, he



Figure 2. Cornelis Saftleven, *A Camel*, 1646, black chalk and brush and black wash, with touches of brown and ochre chalk, 204 x 313 mm, Chicago, Art Institute Chicago, inv. A-1989.201. Image obtained from the Art Institute of Chicago, accessed 20 May, 2025, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/74217/a-camel>.

depicted the animal's fur by employing a mix of black, brown, and ochre chalk, moistening the medium in certain areas (the head and haunches) to produce thicker strokes, contrasting with the drier, more scattered application of chalk in other regions. The inclusion of ink wash provided additional shading to imply the volumes of the camel's form.¹⁰ It is interesting to see how Saftleven approached the depiction of camels in these two drawings. Perhaps the drawings were intended for different collectors, perhaps there were two different camels, or, lastly, Saftleven may have been experimenting with a new method of drawing animals, which would explain the differences between the two. Nevertheless, both works display Saftleven's preoccupation with exotic animals as subjects. *Camel* (1646) integrates Saftleven's interests across media and subjects, featuring both the humorous or fantastical animal image and the expressive, character-driven composition. This work thus embodies the diversity and wit that characterise Saftleven's contribution to Dutch seventeenth-century drawing.

THE PULL OF THE EXOTIC

During this time, drawings and paintings of exotic animals were becoming more common. Like many artists of the seventeenth century, Saftleven was drawn to the period's growing fascination with exotic animals, fuelled by the expanding global reach of the Dutch Republic.¹¹ His *Camel* participates in this trend, capturing an animal that would have been seen as rare and curious. Painters such as Roelant Savery (1576-1639) and David Teniers II (1610-1690) are examples of artists who introduced their imagery in their paintings. Rare animals were used in studies, but also as allegories or satires. Unlike Savery, who depicted camels with a focus on

naturalism and accuracy often based on observations of animals in menageries, Saftleven approaches the subject with a more symbolic and imaginative lens. This drawing and indeed Saftleven's oeuvre as a whole relates more closely to that of Teniers II. Teniers was known for his scenes of peasant life and village festivities, and he shared Saftleven's interest in human character and rustic humour. Teniers's work often included animals not only as background elements but also as narrative devices.¹² Saftleven's *Camel* can be seen as part of this tradition. While not embedded in a genre scene, it carries a comparable spirit of lively depiction and moral ambiguity, typical of genre painting.

Saftleven's *Camel* is highly detailed work, showcasing the artist's abilities and talents in observing animals and capturing anatomical and textural elements. Using black chalk and grey-brown washes, Saftleven creates realism through detailed linework and carefully created fur, posture, and facial expression, giving the camel an almost

human-like presence. Saftleven's depiction avoids fantasy, instead putting the exotic subject in physical reality. The fur, skin folds, and camel's structure are all drawn with realism, making the creature lifelike. This attention to natural detail shows a connection to reality", not as an abstract ideal, but as something tangible and seen. Reality, here, is not constructed through grand historical narratives or idealised forms, but

through actual, real, empirical observations. The camel, an unfamiliar and exotic animal to most at that time, is made without fantasy or embellishment, asserting its presence as a real animal in space and time.

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1. Image obtained from Digital Collections University Leiden, accessed May 20, 2025, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:1276563>.
 2. Ibid., 41.
 3. Those drawings are held in multiple collections. For instance, the Albertina in Vienna has an extensive collection of such drawings, see, for example, Cornelis Saftleven, *Tiere: Katze, Hund, Ziege, Henne, Ente*, H/III/20/30, Catalogue 2020. In: Collection Online, accessed May 29, 2025, [https://sammlung-enonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=\[H/III/20/30\]&showtype=record](https://sammlung-enonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[H/III/20/30]&showtype=record).
 4. Schulz, *Cornelis Saftleven, 1607-1681*, 56.
 5. Ibid. 50.
 6. Jef Schaeps ed., *For Study and Delight: Drawings and Prints from Leiden University* (Leiden University Press, 2016), 244. The date of the gift is currently unknown.
 7. Luuk Pijl, *Van Cuyp Tot Rembrandt: de verzameling Cornelis Hofstede de Groot* (Snoeck, 2005), 238.
 8. White Rose Fine Art. "Cornelis Saftleven (1607–1681) - White Rose Fine Art," May 24, 2023, accessed June 24, 2025, <https://www.whiterosefineart.com/cornelis-saftleven-2/>.
 9. *Four Dromedaries* is kept at The Courtauld Gallery, London, inv. 2344. In: Collection Online, accessed June 26, 2025, <https://gallerycollections.courtauld.ac.uk/object-d-1952-rw-2344>; The location for *A Standing Dromedary Facing left* is currently unknown; The location for *A Camel* is the Art Institute of Chicago, inv. 1989.201. In: Collection Online, accessed June 26, 2025, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/74217/a-camel>. See also: Shelley Karen Perlove and George S. Keyes, *Seventeenth-century European Drawings in Midwestern Collections: The Age of Bernini, Rembrandt, and Poussin* (University of Michigan Press, 2015), 178.
 10. The Art Institute of Chicago, "A Camel," accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/74217/a-camel>.
 11. Marringje Rikken, "Exotic Animal Painting by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Roelant Savery," in *Zoology in Early Modern Culture: Intersections of Science, Theology, Philology, and Political and Religious Education*, ed. Karl Enenkel and Paul Smith (Brill, 2014), 401, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004279179_012.
 12. For apes as an example, see: M.L. Donnelly, *Aping the Nobility: The Monkey Paintings of David Teniers the Younger in Their Social Context* (MA Thesis, Utrecht University, 2011), <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/208301>.

Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, *Ostrich or similar bird*

PIA PESCE CÁNEPA

This essay examines *Ostrich or similar bird* (ca. 1625–1640) by Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, a pen and ink drawing heightened with grey wash, now in the Leiden University Libraries. Although fragmentary, the sheet reveals van de Venne's animated draftsmanship and imaginative approach to animal representation. Rather than a naturalistic study, the drawing blurs boundaries between reality and invention, presenting a whimsical hybrid creature imbued with vitality. Considered alongside works by Roelant Savery and Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt, the drawing exemplifies the multiple functions of early modern animal imagery, oscillating between scientific curiosity, emblematic meaning, and expressive fantasy.

Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, Dutch drawing, Allegory, Satire, Animal studies, Natural history, Emblem books, Roelant Savery, Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt



Adriaen van de Venne

Ostrich or similar bird

ca. 1625–1640

Pen and brown ink, grey wash, over a sketch in black chalk, lined (fragment of larger leaf)

155 x 163 mm, tail on an added piece of paper

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-AW-63.

Condition:

The drawing is intact, yet seems to have been ripped on the right lower side. The right side is jagged, unlike the tail part that was added. The drawing seems to have been ripped from the larger leaf and then stuck on a piece of paper. The top and right border lines seem to have been added later. A line to delimit the drawing was also probably added later.

Marks and inscriptions:

Recto of the passepartout: 'Havory' written in brown ink just below the drawing in the left corner.

Verso not visible as the drawing is stuck to mount.

Provenance:

Sale Amsterdam (De Vries), November 1929; sold to Dr. A. Welcker, Amsterdam; purchased from him by the Print Room in 1957.

This lively depiction of an ostrich or a similar large bird is executed with pen and brown ink overlaid with grey wash, over an initial sketch in black chalk of which some remnants can be seen. It is a technique typical of Adriaen van de Venne's finely controlled yet expressive draftsmanship. The artist employs varied ink thickness and shifting pressure, to describe the bird's feathery texture, particularly along the layered plumage of the back and tail, while also suggesting tension in the elongated, almost exaggerated legs. The grey wash helps model subtle shadows, anchoring the creature to a low patch of ground. Surrounding this, a few sprigs of grass rendered in similarly quick, agile strokes contribute to the drawing's sense of animation and immediacy.

PORTRAYING THE WHIMSICAL

The drawing is a fragment, likely torn from a larger sheet and later mounted. Evidence of this includes the jagged edge on the right, the narrow added strip containing the continuation of the bird's tail, and framing lines along the top and right margins that appear

to be later additions. Despite its fragmentary condition, the composition remains remarkably dynamic and balanced, with the bird's poised, almost strutting stance and sharply defined details lending it vitality and presence. The broken edges do not detract from the energy of the image; instead, they subtly emphasize the drawing's lived history as an object of use and possibly circulation.

Although Van de Venne is best remembered for his sociopolitical allegories, emblematic prints, and grisaille scenes, this drawing reflects another significant aspect of his practice: his engagement with the natural world, often filtered through imaginative or symbolic reinterpretation.¹ The bird was probably not drawn from life, or from a taxidermy model. It could have been copied from a print, yet it seems more plausible that it is the product of artistic invention, a fantastical composite inspired loosely by the ostrich, but unconstrained by anatomical precision. The exaggeratedly expressive wings, flared tail feathers, and arched neck suggest a whimsical invention rather than a zoological study. As such, the drawing fits neatly into Van de Venne's broader

tendency to imbue even his animal subjects with caricature, wit, or layered symbolic resonance, much like the satirical edge often found in his depictions of human behaviour.

The function of the drawing remains uncertain. The high level of finish and the presentation on a small, contained sheet suggest it was not a preparatory study for a painting. It more likely belongs to a group of animal drawings intended as designs for engraving. One such example is *The Whale and a Smaller Fish in Front of a Rocky Coast*, of which the final engraved version has survived.² In the case of the ostrich, however no print is known. Van de Venne produced several designs for book illustrations. One notable instance is his collaboration with

Jacob Cats (1577-1660), whose emblem books paired didactic verse with moralizing imagery.³ Within such a context, iconography becomes the primary vehicle of meaning, and even the most whimsical animal figures could carry layered significance.

FORM AND MEANING

The drawing's iconography is ambiguous; although titled "ostrich," the creature's long legs, feather configuration, and dramatically curved neck could just as easily suggest a fantastical or composite bird, in line with Van de Venne's imaginative and emblematic tendencies. Perhaps the artist was intentionally blurring species boundaries to provoke curiosity, irony, or self-reflection in the viewer. Birds were frequent figures in Van de Venne's allegorical works, often symbolizing vanity, folly, or the allure of the exotic, interpretations that depended heavily on textual or pictorial context. This image resists a single interpretation, offering instead a layered, ambiguous subject that exists between taxonomy and theatrical invention.

Comparable works in terms of both technique and motif include feathered pen studies in the British Museum and Rijksmuseum collections, where Van de Venne similarly manipulates line and wash to achieve texture and movement.⁴ The modulation of wash across the body and tail lightly pooled in shaded regions, and dryly brushed in others, mirrors the treatment of ink in these examples, reinforcing the idea of a stylistic coherence in his handling of animal form.

Comparable motifs may also be found in the works of Roelant Savery (1576-1639), whose drawings offer a more analytical, though often equally theatrical, approach.⁵ While Savery's animals are more compositionally composed, Van de Venne's creatures are more expressive, at times approaching caricature. The oscillation



Figure 1. Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt (possibly), *Ostrich* (*Struthio camelus*), ca. 1596 – 1610, coloured watercolour and gouache with brush, heightened in white, pencil, pen and brown ink, 353 x 152 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-T-BR-2017-1-3-38.

between factual and fantastical and between observation and invention is a familiar feature of bird drawings of the period, the result filtered by different visual intentions.

A further comparison may be drawn with a sheet showing an *Ostrich* (see Fig. 1) possibly by Anselmus Boetius de Boodt (1550–1632), a physician and naturalist in the service of Rudolf II. De Boodt's ostrich, likely drawn for scientific documentation, was intended for inclusion in a natural history encyclopaedia.⁶ It exhibits a markedly different sensibility: highly centralized composition, vertical orientation, and a still, symmetrical pose devoid of environment. The image is informative and classificatory. In contrast, Van de Venne's drawing is horizontal, dynamic, and rich in surrounding vegetation, emphasizing movement, mood, and surface vitality. Both works feature fine detail, but where De Boodt's clarity is achieved through delicate watercolour and fine linear control, Van de Venne achieves his liveliness through varied ink application and sharply contrasting wash. The former transmits knowledge; the latter conveys character.

The date of the drawing is tentative, though stylistically and thematically it likely belongs to the middle period of Van de Venne's career, around 1625–1640. During this time, he was active in The Hague and collaborated closely with authors like Jacob Cats, whose emblematic and moralizing texts formed an ideal context for drawings of this kind. This was a particularly productive period for Van de Venne, in which allegory, satire, and hybrid figuration dominated much of his output.

Van de Venne's *Ostrich* or similar bird demonstrates how early seventeenth-century artists such as Van de Venne negotiated the boundaries between fact and fantasy. Drawing served not merely as preparation for painting, but as a standalone medium for performance, invention, and coded commentary. Whether the creature depicted is a real ostrich, a humorous distortion, or a symbolic stand-in for human behaviour, Van de Venne's drawing walks the line between observed reality and imagined possibility, embodying the early modern artist's dual role as both naturalist and storyteller.

1. Thomas Bodkin, "Adrien Van De Venne," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 46 (1923): 233–48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30093719>.

2. Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, Whale and a smaller fish in front of a rocky coast, PK-T-AW-83.

3. Jacob Cats, *Moral Emblems: With Aphorisms, Adages, and Proverbs of All Ages and Nations* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1860).

4. British Museum, "Adriaen van de Venne (Biographical details)," The British Museum Collection Online, accessed June 1, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG49557>.

Rijksmuseum, "Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne," Rijksmuseum Collection, accessed June 1, 2025, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/node/Adriaen-Pietersz.-van-de-Venne--9d406389933b31924b483b4de11b69dd>.

5. Michael Prodger, "How Roelandt Savery Gathered Together the Wonders of the Natural World," *New Statesman*, March 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/art-design/2022/03/how-roelandt-savery-gathered-together-the-wonders-of-the-natural-world>.

6. Linda Hall Library, "Scientist of the Day – Anselmus de Boodt," Linda Hall Library, June 21, 2016, <https://www.lindahall.org/about/news/scientist-of-the-day/anselmus-de-boodt/>.

Drawing nature with precision. Seventeenth-century botanical visions by Balthasar van der Ast

SUZANNE VAN STRATUM

This article examines the drawing *Papaver somniferum* or poppy (*Purper Dubbel Mancop*) attributed to Balthasar van der Ast (1593-1657). Executed in brown ink and watercolour, the sheet presents a single, isolated flower rendered with both naturalistic precision and aesthetic refinement. The drawing's technique, which combines delicate linework, subtle washes, and calligraphy, suggests a dual function: as a preparatory model for Van der Ast's still lifes and as a collectible within a florilegium. The study situates the work within the seventeenth-century tradition of botanical drawings and explores its role as a visual aide-mémoire for the artist as well as an object of display for collectors. Issues of attribution are addressed, given the historical confusion with contemporaries such as Bartholomeus Assteyn, whose monogram and style closely resemble Van der Ast's. Ultimately, *Papaver somniferum* embodies the intersection of art, horticulture, and collecting culture in the Dutch seventeenth-century reflecting how botanical imagery mediated knowledge, taste, and artistic practice.

Balthasar van der Ast, Botanical drawing, Flower study, Still life tradition, Seventeenth century, Artistic collecting



Balthasar van der Ast

Papaver somniferum or poppy ('*Purper Dubbel Mancop*')

Brown ink, watercolour, washed in different colours (with a brush), such as purple and green, maybe some green and purple chalk, and gouache on paper

301 x 204 mm

Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-2513.

Condition:

Good, some spotting on verso and recto, and a folding line on the lower right verso.

Marks and inscriptions:

Inscription of the flower's name ('*Purper Dubbel Mancop*') and a monogram 'BA' at the lower right of the verso. On the lower right of the recto 'inv. 2513.'

Provenance:

Driesten.

Literature:

Beatrijs Brenninkmeijer-de Rooy, "Schone uitgelezene bloemen, een goede schikking en harmonie," *Kunstschrift* 31, no. 3 (1987): 102, fig. 41; Marringje Rikken, "From Top to Bottom and from Root to Crown: Plant and Animal Drawings," in *For Study and Delight: Drawings and Prints from Leiden University*, ed. J. Schaeps (Leiden Publications, 2016), 243, fig. 9.3.

Papaver somniferum or poppy shows an eye-catching flower with a richly filled crown of purple-pink petals. The delicately serrated petals curve outward in an elegant, almost ornamental manner. Their colour ranges from a deep, wine-red tone at the edges to a lighter, silvery lilac at the core. The stem is thin and elegantly curved, with sharply delineated light and dark green leaves at the bottom. Written right below the flower in calligraphy is the name *Purper Dubbel Mancop*, referring to a popular garden flower in the seventeenth century.¹ The flower is isolated against a blank background. The focus is entirely on the individual example, which, by its placement and calligraphy, is presented with care and precision.

BALANCING OBSERVATION AND AESTHETIC

The drawing is overall made in brown ink and coloured with watercolour in purple, pink and green tones. The lines are fine and precise, especially in the leaf texture and veining. The watercolour is applied in such a manner that, in the petals, subtle colour transitions add depth to the form. The

leaves are partly set up in washed areas of colour, possibly with the addition of chalk, which softens the texture and emphasises the matte nature of the leaves. The combination of outline and colour not only communicates precision, but also evokes the beauty of the flower. The choice of brown ink in the stem and the crown, instead of, for example, black, adds to the softness of the representation. Brown ink produces a softer contrast compared to black ink, allowing it to blend more naturally with the coloured washes. The execution of the materials is delicate and controlled, as can be seen in the nuanced brushwork of the petals and the soft gradients in the leaves. Based on technique, choice of materials, and the overall finished look, the drawing is in keeping with the tradition of seventeenth-century botanical drawings that balance between observation and aesthetics. What is striking is that the emphasis does not lie on documenting a botanical subject in scientific detail, but rather on its aesthetic qualities and visual appeal. This suggests the drawing was perhaps not so much made for scientific study, but rather



Figure 1. Balthasar van der Ast, *Basket of Flowers*, 1622, oil on panel, 18.4 x 23.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, inv. no. 1992.51.2.

functioned as a model for floral still lifes or formed part of a collector's florilegium.

The flower stands isolated on the page; there is no vase, no dirt, nor are there even any insects surrounding it. This choice, along with the drawing style and curvy calligraphy, suggests that the drawing may indeed have been intended for inclusion in a florilegium, an album circulated among collectors, other artists, or even gardeners in the seventeenth century. Such albums were used as a visual record of flower varieties that were grown in gardens or could be incorporated into still lifes.² Through the aquarelles in these albums, gardeners could show their customers the flowers they could grow outside of the flowering season. At the same time, the drawing's careful execution opens up the possibility that it served as a reference for painted compositions, a function explored further below. Therefore, it is plausible that the drawing was initially produced as a type of *aide-mémoire* to help the artist visualise the flower during its non-blooming months, and later became a collectable. Balthasar van der Ast was one of such artists who produced such albums of various flower studies.³

VISUAL ARCHIVE OF FLORAL MOTIFS

As Spicer and Segal argue, Van der Ast relied on such watercolours of flowers for his flower still-life paintings, since the flower arrangements he depicted often feature botanically impossible combinations: tulips, irises, and roses do not bloom in the same seasons (see Fig. 1).⁴ This indicates the existence of a visual archive he could fall back on. Moreover, Gregory notes that van der Ast reuses certain flowers in his paintings from different periods, which also argues in favour of his having such model studies.⁵ At the same time, the careful character of the calligraphy and the graceful composition point to another audience: the collector or lover of ornamental flowers. The combination of the calligraphy, refined execution of the flower and the monogram on the lower right suggests that it is a work of art in its own right, suitable for storage or display. Besides, the intertwined signature or monogram 'B.A.' in the lower right corner of the recto adds to the drawing's function: used not just as preparatory studies, but also as part of a trade album or as a showpiece.

If we compare this drawing to Balthasar van der Ast's painted oeuvre, several obvious similarities stand out. Van der Ast became best known for his flower still lifes in oil, in which he often combined flowers with shells, insects or fruit, usually placed in richly decorated vases. Although *Papaver somniferum* differs significantly in both medium, being a watercolour on paper rather than an oil painting, and in design, as it depicts a single isolated flower rather than a complex still-life arrangement, it nonetheless shares characteristics typical of his paintings. For example, great attention is paid to naturalistic detail, colour contrast and a carefully balanced composition. The clear design of the flower, combined with a painterly finesse, aligns closely with Van der Ast's paintings, which feature similar flowers.

Importantly, the flower in this drawing is very similar in shape and colouring, purple-pink and lilac, to a poppy that appears in several of Van der Ast's paintings, for example, in *Basket of Flowers* at the middle left (see Fig. 2). Although in his paintings it is often part of a larger composition, it thus seems plausible that he relied on separate studies for the depiction of the flowers, already emphasised by Segal and Gregory.⁶ Remarkably, more than 480 drawings have been attributed to van der Ast.⁷ Almost all of these are executed in watercolour and show isolated individual flowers or shells, often numbered and monogrammed, such as *Pink Carnation* ('De Witte Morleon'), which was with the art dealers Haboltd & Co, Paris. *Papaver somniferum* aligns perfectly with



Figure 2. Balthasar van der Ast, *Pink Carnation* ('De Witte Morleon'), 1632-1657, brush in colour on paper, 313 x 203 mm, Haboltd & Co, Paris.

this series in terms of style and subject matter.

QUESTIONS OF ATTRIBUTION

However, the attribution is not without controversy, partly because of the stylistic features that also appear in works by contemporaries, especially Bartholomeus Assteyn (1607-after 1669). According to Laurens Bol, the calligraphic, dashing lines of the monogram were typical of Assteyn, who also produced a series of numbered floral studies in album format, presumably intended for florists or collectors.⁸ Bol based his opinion on the specific, graceful linework of the monogram, which he said was more in line with Assteyn's hand than van der Ast's.⁹ *Papaver somniferum* shares such strong stylistic and technical affinities with this larger group of watercolour drawings, which supports the attribution to Van der Ast.

Originally, the series had been attributed to Bartholomeus Assteyn, but in 1994, Sam Segal reattributed the group to Van der Ast. His argument was based on extensive comparison with signed works by Van der Ast, noting shared motifs and similar rendering of floral forms.¹⁰ Since then, the RKD and Foundation Custodia in Paris have also adopted this attribution. The confusion is understandable: both artists worked with watercolour, signed their work as 'B.A.', and presumably worked within similar visual traditions and markets. However, Assteyn's depiction of flowers is different from Van der Ast's depiction. This is for example evident in *Still life with flowers, shells and a frog* (Cultural Heritage Agency, Amersfoort), a painting made by Assteyn, where the flowers are not painted with the same softness as seen in the drawing and Van der Ast's painting.

Van der Ast worked closely with other members of the so-called Bosschaert-van der Ast group, including Ambrosius

Bosschaert the Younger (1609-1645), his teacher and brother-in-law. Van der Ast's work also shows colour intensity and a clear influence of Roelant Savery (1576-1639).¹¹ From Savery, he adopted the inclusion of small animals and shells as decorative elements, as well as a vibrant use of colour, features more explicitly present in his paintings than in his drawings, although *Papaver somniferum* shares this refined colour palette. The drawings' provenance can only be partially reconstructed. It dates around 1632-1657, during van der Ast's stay in Delft.¹² It is mentioned that the drawing was acquired through a certain 'Driesten,' but further details are lacking, which leaves the context of earlier ownership unclear.

Papaver somniferum or *poppy* is a delicate watercolour drawing of a popular garden flower in the early modern Low Countries.

The drawing shows a subtle balance between observation and aesthetic appeal. The use of brown ink, vibrant watercolour, and graceful calligraphy makes the drawing both an object of study and a work of art in its own right. Its lack of scientific detail suggests that it was less intended for classification than for visual appreciation. The drawing functioned as a memory aid for the artist's later flower works. The sheet falls with the 'realistic' category: it depicts an existing flower species with great precision, without allegory or fantastical elements. At the same time, the drawing transcends its purely registrational character through its elegant execution, which is why it is plausible that the drawing later became a collectable in a florilegium. *Papaver somniferum* or *poppy* thus exemplifies the seventeenth-century fascination with flora as a subject of knowledge, taste and artistic expression.

1. Beatrijs Brenninkmeijer-de Rooy, "Schone uitgelezen bloemen, een goede schikking en harmonie," *Kunstschrift* 31, no. 3 (1987): 102.

2. Anna Johnston, "Exhibiting the Enlightenment: Joseph Banks's *Florilegium* and Colonial Knowledge Production," *Journal of Australian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2019): 130.

3. Segal and Roding, *De tulp en de kunst*, 81.

4. Spicer, *Masters of Light*, 47; Sam Segal, *Tulips Portrayed: the tulip trade in Holland in the 17th century* (Museum voor de Bloembollenstreek, 1992), 93.

5. Quint Gregory, in *Masters of Light*, 362.

6. Segal, *Tulips Portrayed*, 93; Gregory, *Masters of Light*, 362.

7. Segal and Roding, *De tulp en de kunst*, 96.

8. Laurens Bol, *Goede onbekenden*, 59.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Bakker and Bol, *Masters of Middelburg*, 108; Gregory, *Masters of Light*, 360.

12. "Balthasar van der Ast," RKD, accessed May 18, 2025, <https://rkd.nl/artists/2800>.

Jacob de Gheyn II, *Clump of grass and other plants*

GARGI TUPKAR

The article, exploring themes in botanical drawings, is a detailed analysis of Jacob de Gheyn II's drawing, *Clump of Grass and Other Plants*. The drawing showcases the intersection of art and science in and just prior to Dutch Golden Age botanical studies, offering a detailed study of ordinary Dutch flora. The drawing is done in pen and brown ink using fine lines, cross-hatching, and careful use of negative space. It isolates a dense, messy clump of grass against a blank background, giving full attention to its natural complexity. The depiction of identifiable Dutch species suggests the drawing was perhaps made *naer 't leven*, reflecting Gheyn's shift from the stylized influence of Hendrick Goltzius toward empirical observation. Carefully preserved at the Leiden University Special Collections, the work highlights Gheyn's role in bridging Mannerist aesthetics with early scientific naturalism.

Jacob de Gheyn II, Plant studies, Botanical drawing, Cross-hatching, *Naer 't leven*



Jacob de Gheyn II
Clump of grass and other plants
 1590-1629
 Brown ink with pen
 67 x 103 mm
 Leiden, Special Collections, Leiden University Libraries, PK-T-1666.¹

Condition:

Fairly good condition, paper has been restored in three corners, except for the bottom right.

Marks and inscriptions:

Verso: Leiden University's mark on the back 'R PRENTEN KABINET LEIDEN'; dark lines along the right and bottom edge of the paper.

Exhibitions:

Hollandse Tekeningen rond 1600, The Hague (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, 1952); L.J. Bol, *Bekoring van het kleine*, Dordrecht (Dordrechts Museum) 1959; Amsterdam, 1960; Leiden, 1966-1967; *De kunstenaar vertelt... Jacob de Gheyn II (1565-1629)* (Provincie Overijssel, 1979).

Literature:

I.Q. van Regteren Altena, *Jacques de Gheyn, three generations* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), III, nr. 1006, pl. 224; Marringje Rikken, "From Top to Bottom and from Root to Crown: Plant and Animal Drawings," In *For Study and Delight: Drawings and Prints from Leiden University*, ed. J. Schaeps (Leiden Publications, 2016), 242, fig. 9.2

Plant studies have been a popular form of art since antiquity, where highly accurate botanical studies were created, primarily perhaps for medical purposes. By the fifteenth century, aesthetics became a key variable in these kinds of plant studies and this shift is reflected in the work of notable artists such as Hendrick Goltzius, as well as his student, Jacob de Gheyn.² Jacob de Gheyn's *Clump of grass and other plants* is a fairly small drawing, offering a snapshot into the flora of an everyday Dutch landscape. While the scale of the drawing is small, the level of botanical detail and movement captured within the composition showcases a deep engagement with the natural world. The drawing showcases the relative messiness of a densely packed clump of grass while adding striking details of leaves, flora, and bulbs of flowers in the centre making them stand out.

TECHNIQUE

The medium of the drawing is brown ink applied with a pen. De Gheyn used an very fine pen, which lends to showcasing the delicacy of the plants. His cross hatching creates depth and layering, while the careful use of negative space to separate individual blades and stems, gives the drawing a sense of clarity, preventing it from becoming overly dense despite the fine detail. In some parts there has only been a light amount of cross hatching, especially towards the outer edges of the clump, showing a lower density in vegetation. In contrast, the cross hatching between the blades of the grasses on the right side of the drawing are much darker and denser, having been made with multiple layering of the ink, making the brown ink look almost black. Dark cross hatching has further been used on the ground, to create the illusion of a sudden shift from a flat ground to a small dip to where the plants are growing. As the cross hatching on the ground tapers off into

blank space immediately and almost abruptly, the entire focus is on the subject i.e. the clump of grass itself.

The clump of grass has no background, which isolates it from its natural setting. This focuses all attention on the plants themselves, as if plucked from the environment and suspended for close observation. Species of the plants depicted in the drawing have been identified in the literature and include creeping buttercup, lady's bedstraw, leaf of a ground ivy and white dead-nettle on the left side of the drawing, thus making it a typical scene from a Dutch landscape, with fully bloomed flowers concentrated at the bottom and the buds of flowers primarily depicted at the top ends of the stems.³ The angle of the drawing is such as if De Gheyn was sitting almost at eye level of a tuft of grass while drawing. The blades of the grass are rounded and curved, bending naturally and primarily towards the right, giving an illusion of movement in the wind.

AFTER NATURE

Considering these aspects as well as the specific species of plants, this drawing could have been drawn as a directly after what was observed in nature.⁴ De Gheyn is known to have drawn from nature with a striking attention to detail and thus, this small drawing may well have been drawn *naer 't leven* or perhaps partly *uyt den geest*. De Gheyn is known to regularly ventured out into nature, taking chalk and paper with him and completing the details of recorded drawings later in his workshop.⁵ However, there are no observable indications for any use of chalk in this drawing, which doesn't rule out it was depicted from nature directly in pen and ink.

A comparable work is Albrecht Dürer's drawing *A great piece of turf* (see Fig. 1), from 1503. Although done in watercolour, the drawing also shows a detailed depiction of

an unorganised piece of grass, similar to De Gheyn's *Clump of grass and other plants*. Dürer, like De Gheyn, depicts species of plants native to the German landscape with striking similarities in terms of composition.⁶ There is a shared focus on a disorganised patch of nature, and both artists isolate their subjects against a blank background, compelling the observer to engage solely with the natural complexity of the botanical subject. Dürer, however, depicted the ground with brown wash and gouache at an angle that draws attention beyond the grass, giving it an even more natural outlook. Dürer does not isolate a particular plant or species for study, but instead depicts the natural state of disarray, while still focusing on the realism of each blade of grass in the drawing.⁷ The grasses are densely packed, represented with varying shades of greens



Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, *The large piece of turf*, 1503, watercolour, 42.8 x 31.5 cm. (Albertina Museum, Vienna). Image obtained from Google Arts & Culture, accessed June 27, 2025, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-large-piece-of-turf-1503-albrecht-d%C3%BCrer/NgELdACK3l8Jkg?hl=en>.

for shadows and highlights, something De Gheyn does by using cross-hatching.

The topmost edge of De Gheyn's *Clump of grass and other plants* indicates it has been cut out of a larger sheet. One of the grass blades at the top has been cut clean through. Also, there is a curved almost tail-like dark line coming down the upper edge towards the centre-left as well as several smaller lines around it. These do not fit into

the drawing of the grass and may be coming from another drawing at one point above it. There are dark mount lines on the bottom and right edge of the paper, but none on the left or the top. As three of the corners except the bottom right have been restored, this combined indicates that the paper was cut out of a larger sheet with other drawings and thus indeed may have been done as practice.

ATTRIBUTION

The attribution for this drawing has gone back and forth between Goltzius and De Gheyn, owing to a similarity in style of plant studies between the two artists. Considering the fact that De Gheyn was Goltzius' student for several years, it seems he adopted a similar style and approach, especially during the beginning of his career. De Gheyn previously actively engaged in drawing flora and natural landscapes very different to this particular one. His tree trunk studies, for instance, while being modelled after what he was observed in nature, were dramatized in terms of features and details, somewhat reminiscent of Goltzius' style as for instance can be seen in *A foxglove in bloom* (see Fig. 2).⁸ Especially similar is the use of hatching to create shadows and depth, as well as the way the ground is depicted. The key difference however, is that De Gheyn's work seems to be focused on attempting to capture the observations of plants in-situ, in an almost scientifically true picture, a direction he started taking after the 1598.⁹ Goltzius, here, focuses on a singular species, as was the norm at the time, while De Gheyn captures the scene of the grass as a whole. According to documentation available at the Leiden collections, the attribution of the *Clump of grass* to Jacques de Gheyn is based on oral communication of Van Regteren Altena, the well-known collector and art historian, who received his doctorate for his thesis on Jacques de Gheyn II.¹⁰



Figure 2. Hendrick Goltzius, *A Foxglove in bloom*, 1592, brown ink on laid paper, 17.5 x 9.8 cm. (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC., inv. no. 1996.44.1). Image obtained from National Gallery of Art website, accessed June 3, 2025, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/94900-foxglove-bloom>.

The reason for De Gheyn's change in direction or style is not exactly clear, but it may have had to do with his life in Leiden and his relationship with the botanist and professor at the Hortus Botanicus, Carolus Clusius. Textual sources do not reveal much about this relationship, but Gheyn was commissioned by Clusius to make his portrait, indicating some level of a relationship between the two. Also, De Gheyn made a drawing of a complete view of the Hortus Botanicus.¹¹ Perhaps, owing to this close engagement with a horticulture establishment and its various flora, this may have influenced De Gheyn in picking up a more naturalistic approach towards this subject of drawing.¹² By extension then, the drawing could be dated to somewhere towards the end of the sixteenth century or beginning of the seventeenth century, after 1598 during his stay at Leiden.

The provenance for the drawing can only be partially reconstructed for the twentieth century. Although the full provenance prior to its acquisition by Leiden University is not

comprehensively documented, its restorations suggest it has been preserved carefully within academic and museum contexts.

De Gheyn seems to align himself closely with reality in this drawing. There are few manipulations of structure or aesthetic in the drawing and the drawing looks like it is an attempt at capturing the scene of the grass as naturalistically as possible. De Gheyn avoids idealization, instead presenting a faithful, detailed study of a natural scene. The careful depiction of different plant species and the use of cross-hatching create a textured, lifelike image yet full of aesthetic charm. This drawing stands at the intersection of art and science during the Dutch Golden Age, highlighting De Gheyn's unique position as an artist, bridging the dramatic Mannerist style of the late sixteenth century and the perhaps more empirical, observational approach characteristic of the Dutch Golden Age.

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1. Image obtained from Leiden University Digital Collections, accessed June 3, 2025, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1276357?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=7bd98023f0b8749a4c1f&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0.
 2. Marringje Rikken, "From Top to Bottom and from Root to Crown: Plant and Animal Drawings," in *For Study and Delight: Drawings and Prints from Leiden University*, ed. Jeff Schaeps (Leiden Publications, 2016), 238.
 3. Rikken, "From Top to Bottom," 242, fig. 9.2
 4. Greda Gehlen, *Grasspol met bloemen* (Leiden University, 1988), 1.
 5. *Study of a Tree Trunk*, Rijksmuseum, accessed July 1, 2025, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Study-of-a-tree-trunk--882a90c9785c8b292aa159f15c92fa41>.
 6. Yvonne Marcotte, "Albrecht Dürer's 'The Great Piece of Turf,'" *The Epoch Times*, October 4, 2023, accessed June 26, 2025, <https://www.theepochtimes.com/bright/albrecht-durers-a-great-piece-of-turf-5375332>.
 7. Tom Lubbock, "Durer, Albrecht: The Large Turf (1503), *The Independent*, January 18, 2008, accessed June 26, 2025, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/durer-albrecht-the-large-turf-1503-770976.html#artist>.
 8. Ibid. Further, see <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/94900-foxford-bloom>
 9. Ibid
 10. Monique Daniels, "Regteren Altena, I. Q., van," *Dictionary of Art Historians* (website), accessed September 4, 2025, <https://arthistorians.info/regterenaltenai/>.
 11. Rijksmuseum, "View of the Herb Garden (Hortus Botanicus) of Leiden University," accessed June 4, 2025, [https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Gezicht+op+de+Kruidentuin+\(Hortus+Botanicus\)+van+de+Leidse+Universiteit--0542bf55b3f6ec5e82415f5022b1f92f](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Gezicht+op+de+Kruidentuin+(Hortus+Botanicus)+van+de+Leidse+Universiteit--0542bf55b3f6ec5e82415f5022b1f92f).
 12. *De kunstenaar vertelt... Jacob de Gheijn II (1565–1629)* (Provincie Overijssel, 1979).

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