



**Still Life with Peaches, Grapes, and
Melon and a Butterfly on a Stone
Plate**

Dordrecht School

ca. 1660–80

oil on panel

40.5 x 35 cm

signed (erroneously) in dark paint along lower
right corner: "G.Schalcke"

GS-100



How To Cite

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Prior to the appearance of *Still Life with Peaches, Grapes, and Melon and a Butterfly on a Stone Plate* in a London sale in 2001, only two still lifes by Godefridus Schalcken were known.^[1] Much excitement surrounded this discovery because the attribution was deemed correct, both because the painting was signed and because Schalcken featured similar peaches and grapes in other paintings. Indeed, Schalcken's best-known still life is *A Bunch of Grapes* in Stockholm, a canvas that Peter Hecht has convincingly related to late seventeenth-century theoretical discussions about the best way for artists to study chiaroscuro.^[2]

The still life ensemble includes two bunches of grapes—one red and one white—that rest on a green stone plinth, at the edge of which are two peaches and a blue ribbon. Behind the grapes is a large yellow-green melon, on top of which lie a medlar and a branch with dried, yellowish leaves that contrast with the dark, reddish-brown background.^[3] Hovering at the left is a Red Admiral butterfly (*Vanessa atalanta*), which is still commonly found in the Netherlands. A dark strip approximately two centimeters wide extends across the lower edge of the panel.

Although the signature at first seems to support an attribution of this painting to Schalcken, its character actually differs from the artist's normal manner of signing. To begin with, the artist's name is not rendered with his usual, powerful brushwork on the stone plinth, which would have been the logical place for him to sign this work. Rather, the signature is rather hesitantly drawn at the extreme lower right with a fine brush and black paint on the dark background, barely discernible to the naked eye. Uncharacteristically, the G is placed somewhat lower than normal and the E is higher than the other letters, which look straggly compared to the firmly defined strokes of his usual hand.^[4] It now appears that the signature is apocryphal and was added at a later date. Stylistic comparisons also call into question this painting's attribution to Schalcken. Not only is the palette different, but the painting lacks the painter's flowing brushwork.^[5]

An interesting comparison can be made between the two peaches in this painting and those in Schalcken's *Portrait of a Lady*, 1680, and his *Venus with Cupid, Bacchus and Ceres* in Prague, which also dates around 1680.^[6] As Meijer has rightly observed, Schalcken's peaches in the latter two paintings are stylistically similar to those executed by his

Comparative Figures



contemporary from Dordrecht, Abraham van Calraet (1642–1722). In 1678 Schalcken's teacher, Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), published his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* ("Introduction to the Academy of Painting"), in which he praised Van Calraet—though not by name—for distinguishing himself "by portraying a large dish piled high with beautiful peaches, extremely juicy and perfectly rendered."^[7] As a young artist, Schalcken undoubtedly studied Van Hoogstraten's book and shared his teacher's admiration for Van Calraet's manner of depicting peaches, as is evident in the way he modeled peaches in the two paintings executed around 1680.^[8]

Even if Schalcken were inspired by Van Calraet, there is no evidence that he made fruit and flower still lifes at that time: these only appear in his English period (1692–96). *A Bouquet of Flowers* in Oxford can be dated to the 1690s, and a similarly late date holds true for *A Bunch of Grapes* in Stockholm.^[9] By that period of his career, Schalcken's style had evolved, and neither of these still life paintings is reminiscent of those by Van Calraet.^[10] Strikingly, however, *Still Life with Peaches, Grapes, and Melon and a Butterfly on a Stone Plate* is closely related in composition, pictorial elements and workmanship to one of Van Calraet's earliest known still lifes, in which he depicted a bunch of white grapes and five peaches on a plinth with two Red Admiral butterflies.^[11] Further research is needed to determine whether the present painting can actually be attributed to Van Calraet, but without doubt this painting is closer in style to Van Calraet's still lifes than to those made by Schalcken.

A date of execution around 1670 is supported by dendrochronological examination. The panel's last complete growth ring dates from 1646, which means that the West European oak that supplied the wood for this panel was felled after 1654. The still life is therefore likely to have been completed between 1660 and 1680.^[12]

-Guido Jansen

Endnotes

1. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 209 and 210. His nos. 249 and 250 were once wrongly attributed to Schalcken. Mention must also be made here of a *Vanitas Still Life* in Geneva, Switzerland, which is ascribed to Schalcken on the basis of the lettering around a clock, which is read as “G[...]lken”; Frédéric Elsig, *L’art et ses marches: La peinture flamande et hollandaise, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles, au Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève* (Geneva, 2009), 352, no. 230; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 354. That painting has been attributed to Schalcken for more than two centuries, since it was reproduced in 1815 by Landon as a line engraving in his *Galerie de M. Massias*, 144–45, planche 69, *Tableau de nature morte, effet de lampe, par Schalken*. This painting is not likely to be identical with the *Vanity by Scalken* in Mr. Sykes Sale 1733 (1st Day), lot 67; see Mansfield Kirby Talley, “*Small, usuall, and vulgar things*”: *Still-Life Painting in England 1635–1760*, Walpole Society 49 (London, 1983), 210. In spite of its very old attribution, the painting in Geneva is not the work of Schalcken.
2. Peter Hecht, “Candlelight and Dirty Fingers, or Royal Virtue in Disguise: Some Thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalken,” *Simiolus* 11, no. 1 (1980): 31–35.
3. Fred G. Meijer, *The Collection of Dutch and Flemish Still Life Paintings Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward* (catalogue of the Daisy Linda Ward collection of paintings of the Ashmolean Museum) (Zwolle, 2003), 273, note 2.
4. Complicating an assessment of the signature, the N is missing due to damage to the paint surface. With thanks to the restorer of the Dordrechts Museum, Lidwien Speleers, who in November 2012 allowed me to study the panel unframed and in good lighting conditions, including ultraviolet light.
5. In contrast to the assertions made in Fred G. Meijer, *The Collection of Dutch and Flemish Still Life Paintings Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward* (catalogue of the Daisy Linda Ward collection of paintings of the Ashmolean Museum) (Zwolle, 2003), 273 n. 2.
6. See Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 117, for the *Portrait of a Lady*, and no. 43 for the large canvas in Prague. For the latter painting, see also Hanna Seifertova, in Anja K. Sevcik, *National Gallery in Prague: Dutch Paintings of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Prague, 2012), no. 395, with an illustration in color.
7. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst: Anders de zichtbaere werelt; Verdeelt in negen leerwinkels, yder bestiert door eene der zanggodinnen...* (Rotterdam, 1678), 181: “Zeker Schilder, mijn lantsgenoot, had laetst zijn vlijt dapper betoont: want hy had een groote en wel opgehoopte schootel met schoone Persikken uittermaeten sappich en net uitgeschildert, en zich in stuk voor stuk dapper gequeeten. Ik verwonderde my, die ziende, over zijn vlijt en gedult” (A certain painter, my

fellow townsman, recently demonstrated his diligence by portraying a large dish piled high with beautiful peaches, extremely juicy and perfectly rendered, having acquitted himself well in each and every one. Upon seeing that, I was amazed at his diligence and patience).

8. It is always possible, of course, that Schalcken had seen and possibly admired the peach still lifes by his fellow townsman on an earlier occasion, without this exerting an immediate influence on his work. It is undeniable that Schalcken painted Van Calraet-like peaches only after Van Hoogstraten had praised them in his book.
9. Fred G. Meijer, *The Collection of Dutch and Flemish Still Life Paintings Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward* (catalogue of the Daisy Linda Ward collection of paintings of the Ashmolean Museum) (Zwolle, 2003), 272–73, and Görel Cavalli-Björkman, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings*, 3 vols. (Stockholm, 2005), 446–47, no. 450.
10. Abraham van Calraet, on the other hand, had examined Schalcken's work closely. Several of his genre pieces, painted in the style of Schalcken, were once attributed to him. An example is Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 286, which in my view is by Van Calraet. The small oval painting *A Laughing Man with a Glass of Wine* was also ascribed to Schalcken. Ineke Wansink of the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) has reattributed this panel to Van Calraet; see the note on the photograph kept at the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History). In 1966 this small panel was on display at Norwich Castle Museum as a Schalcken as part of the exhibition *Dutch Paintings from East Anglia*; at the time it belonged to the collection of T. R. C. Blofeld at Hoveton, Wroxham, Norfolk; see M. Rajnai, *Dutch Paintings from East Anglia: Loan Exhibition, 20 July–29 August 1966* (Exh. cat. Norwich Castle Museum) (Norwich, 1966), no. 40 (14.6 x 11.4 cm; not illustrated).
11. This panel, measuring 42 x 37.8 cm, was last seen at a sale in London (Phillips, 5 December 1995, lot 26, with an illustration in color). It is signed in full at the lower left: *167(0) fecit A v kalraet Beeltsnejder*. The type of signature indicates that this is one of Van Calraet's earliest still lifes. A reproduction of it can also be found on the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History)'s website, images, no. 10751.
12. See the report by Ian Tyers, "The Tree-Ring Analysis of 12 Panel Paintings from the Leiden Gallery, New York" (November 2012), 26.

Provenance

- Private collection (sale, Christie's, London, 11 July 2001, no. 40).

- [Rafael Valls Ltd., London, 2002].
- (Sale, Galerie Koller, Zürich, 24 September 2003, no. 3061).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2003.

Exhibition History

- Dordrecht, Dordrecht Museum, temporary exhibition with the permanent collection, November 2010–March 2013 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Beherman, Thierry. *Godfried Schalcken*. Paris, 1988, 330, no. 251.
- Rafael Valls Ltd. *Recent Acquisitions*. London, 2002, no. 30.
- Van der Willigen, Adriaan and Meijer, Fred G. *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-life Painters Working in Oils, 1525–1725*. Leiden, 2003, 178.
- Meijer, Fred G. *The Collection of Dutch and Flemish Still-Life Paintings Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward*. Zwolle, 2003, 123, 272–73, no. 67, n. 2.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, vertically oriented rectangular, wedge-shaped oak, has bevels along three sides.^[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has machine tool marks.^[2] There is one paper label and white chalk along the panel reverse but no wax collection seals, import stamps or panel maker's mark.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by a gray underlayer.^[3] The paint has been smoothly applied with no use of impasto. Dark brown paint is visible below the red paint along the background.^[4]

The painting has not been examined with infrared. In the X-radiograph, the peaches are radio-opaque, and under ultraviolet light, restorations are visible along the background.

The painting is (erroneously) signed in dark paint along the lower right corner but is undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2003 and remains in a good state of preservation.^[5]



Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of wood is based on visual examination only. There are bevels along all but the left edge as viewed from the reverse.
2. Based on visual examination of the X-radiograph. The machine toolmarks are not noted in the Dordrecht examination report.
3. Based on visual examination of the high-resolution image. The ground color and underlayer are not noted in the Dordrecht examination report.
4. The red layer overlaps the yellow leaves.
5. Entry based on December 2011 examination report by Lidwien Speleers, paintings conservator, Dordrecht Museum, and information gleaned by reexamining the front and verso images and the X-radiograph.