



**Young Man and Woman Studying a
Statue of Venus, by Lamplight**

Godefridus Schalcken
(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

ca. 1688–92

oil on canvas

43.8 x 34.9 cm

signed faintly lower right on the base of the
statue: "G. Schalcken"

GS-103

Currently on view at: The National Museum of
China, Beijing



How To Cite

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In this engaging and atmospheric picture, a young man is shown wearing a painter's beret and holding a drawing in his left hand that displays the contours of the plaster or marble statue of a kneeling nude woman in front of him. He points to this statue with his right hand while looking up at the young woman standing next to him, to whom he apparently explains the drawing and the statue. A copper oil lamp illuminates the scene, which is closed off on the right by a green curtain. Discernible in the right foreground is the plaster cast of the head of an antique female figure, probably the so-called Juno Cesi.^[1] Godefridus Schalcken might have been familiar with the actual antique statue of the kneeling Venus (or Aphrodite), or he might have owned a plaster cast of it. He could also have known of this fragment through an engraving by Jan de Bisschop (1628–1671), which De Bisschop based on a drawing by the Roman artist Francesco Salviati (1510–63). Bisschop published this drawing in his *Signorum veterum icones* of 1671 (fig 1).^[2]

Because of its subject—the viewing of art—the painting has previously been interpreted mainly in the context of art theory. Young painters, who had to study antique sculptures before progressing to drawing from a live model,^[3] were advised to draw such sculptures by artificial light; this approach caused the contours of the sculptures to emerge more clearly and allowed the artist to practice rendering objects in relief. This academic practice has fused perfectly here with Schalcken's artistic strength: rendering nocturnal scenes illuminated by artificial light. The glowing flame of the oil lamp both models the smooth surface of the sculpture and gently illuminates the young painters, drawing them together through the subdued reddish tonalities of their faces. Indeed, the atmospheric effects created by the flow of light and color across this image—from the flame's white heat to the sculpture's muted ivory-colored surface and the softly-lit figures—are beautifully rendered and quite evocative.

The presence of lamplight may also allude to studious diligence and dedication—a figurative illumination, or enlightenment, resulting from the true artist's rigorous training. Schnackenburg, a strong proponent of this view, considers the entire painting to be exemplary of a new stylistic and thematic direction in Schalcken's art, in which he examines Bisschop's ideas and ponders classicist thought.^[4] Crucial to this interpretation is the identification of the young man in the painting as Schalcken himself.^[5] Schnackenburg also attaches great importance to the presence

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jan de Bisschop after Francesco Salviati, *Crouching Aphrodite*, engraving, plate 77 in his *Signorum veterum icones* (Hagae-Comitis, 1671)



Fig 2. Godefridus Schalcken, *Allegory of the Treaty of Nijmegen*, ca. 1688–92, oil on canvas, 66 x 82 cm, Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, 1980.12



Fig 3. François de Poilly, *Thesis of Louis-Nicolas and Louis-Nicolas*

of the statue of Venus, which in her eyes refers to the rivalry between painting and sculpture.^[6]

The presence of the statue of Venus is clearly significant, but it has less to do with the many art-theoretical notions attached to the figure than to her role as the goddess of love for the ancient Greeks and Romans alike. Here the subject chiefly involves the love presumed to exist between the young man and the young woman, for which the magnificently spotlighted statue of Venus serves as a catalyst. The amorous context depicted here fits in perfectly with the main themes found in Schalcken's oeuvre, which is filled with references to the kindling of love between two people. The multiple layers of meaning that can be found in this composition make it clear that Schalcken gave great thought to his subjects, an observation previously made by Hecht.^[7]

Beherman dated this small work to between 1680 and 1685, owing to his identification of the protagonists as the painter and his young wife, Françoisia van Diemen, who married in 1679. The dating of Schalcken's genre and history paintings is often problematic because we know only a handful of dated genre scenes and half a dozen dated history paintings, which mainly stem from his later years (see GS-112).^[8] Nevertheless, Beherman's dating of *Young Man and Woman Studying a Statue of Venus, by Lamplight* neglects the fact that the work—in Schalcken's most frequently used format of approximately 44 by 34.9 cm—is painted on canvas. At that stage in his career he would have been more likely to execute paintings of this size on panel, or occasionally on copper (see, for example, GS-102). Moreover, the dry, thin manner of painting and the use of pastel hues, evident here in the figures' pink lips, also differ from the works painted around 1680.

Stylistically, *Young Man and Woman Studying a Statue of Venus, by Lamplight* is closely related to Schalcken's *Allegory of the Treaty of Nijmegen* (fig 2).^[9] Beherman dated this latter painting, of a size rather large for Schalcken, to around 1676–77, largely because the French painter Henri Gascard (1635–1701) produced a thematically similar work depicting *The Signing of the Treaty of Nijmegen between France and Spain on 17 September 1678*, which is preserved in the Museum Het Valkhof in Nijmegen.^[10] It is more likely, however, that Schalcken's *Allegory of the Treaty of Nijmegen*, with its thin application of paint and

Francis Le Tellier, 1684,
engraving, 121 x 82.5 cm,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Est.
AA-6



Fig 4. Godefridus Schalcken, *Portrait of a Lady, Bust-Length, in a Black Dress with White Lace Trim, Here Identified as Françoisia van Diemen, the Artist's Wife, 1692–96*, oil on copper, 9 x 7.4 cm, oval, Private Collection, © Dordrechts Museum/ Marco de Nood



Fig 5. Gerrit Dou, *A Young Artist Drawing by Lamplight*, ca. 1650–55, oil on panel, 29 x 23.5 cm, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, inv. 86, © Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns – Ro scan

somewhat divergent, tempered use of color, originated around 1688–92, toward the end of the artist's activities in Dordrecht. This stylistic dating can be underpinned in yet another way. For this unusual composition, Schalcken appears to have made use of a French engraving published in Paris by François de Poilly (1623–93) in 1684 (**fig 3**).^[11] *Young Man and Woman Studying a Statue of Venus, by Lamplight* should, therefore, be dated to the same period, from around 1688 to 1692. This later dating immediately calls into question the identification of the young artist and his pupil as Schalcken and his wife. Moreover, a small, recently discovered portrait of Françoisia reveals that in these years, having given birth to eight children, she no longer looked as she did in the first year of her marriage (**fig 4**).^[12]

The influence of Schalcken's teacher Gerrit Dou (1613–75) is still present to a remarkable degree in this late painting. Dou painted a large number of works portraying an artist, mostly himself, sometimes working in his studio but always wearing a painter's cap.^[13] Occasionally the artist is shown drawing a statue by the light of an oil lamp, as in *An Artist Drawing* in Brussels (**fig 5**), which is the work most closely related in subject to *Young Man and Woman Studying a Statue of Venus, by Lamplight*.^[14]

-Guido Jansen

Endnotes

1. Sophie Schnackenburg, "'Studium' und 'Inspiratio': Godfried Schalcken's Gemälde 'Kunstbetrachtung bei Lampenlicht' (um 1680/85) im Spannungsfeld ikonographischer Tradition und zeitgenössischer Kunsttheorie," *Müncher Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 54 (2003): 183.
2. J. G. van Gelder and Ingrid Jost, *Jan de Bisschop and His Icones & Paradigmata: Classical Antiquities and Italian Drawings for Artistic Instruction in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Doornspijk, 1985), 161–63, no. 77 with illustration.
3. Betsy Wieseman, in *De Zichtbaere Werelt: Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad*, ed. Peter Marijnissen, Wim de Paus, Peter Schoon, and George Schweitzer (Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) (Zwolle, 1992), 267. Also Ekkehard Mai, in *Wettstreit der Künste: Malerei und Skulptur von Dürer bis Daumier*, ed. Ekkehard Mai and Kurt Wettengl (Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Fondation Corboud) (Wolfenbüttel, 2002), 331.
4. Sophie Schnackenburg, "'Studium' und 'Inspiratio': Godfried Schalcken's Gemälde 'Kunstbetrachtung bei Lampenlicht' (um 1680/85) im Spannungsfeld ikonographischer Tradition und zeitgenössischer Kunsttheorie," *Müncher Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 54 (2003).
5. This identification was first published in Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988). See also Sophie Schnackenburg, "'Studium' und 'Inspiratio': Godfried Schalcken's Gemälde 'Kunstbetrachtung bei Lampenlicht' (um 1680/85) im Spannungsfeld ikonographischer Tradition und zeitgenössischer Kunsttheorie," *Müncher Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 54 (2003): 207 n. 4, for all those who adopted Beherman's identification.
6. In addition to Sophie Schnackenburg, "'Studium' und 'Inspiratio': Godfried Schalcken's Gemälde 'Kunstbetrachtung bei Lampenlicht' (um 1680/85) im Spannungsfeld ikonographischer Tradition und zeitgenössischer Kunsttheorie," *Müncher Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 54 (2003), see also Peter Hecht, "Art Beats Nature, and Painting Does So Best of All: The Paragone Competition in Duquesnoy, Dou and Schalcken" *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 184–201.
7. Peter Hecht, "Candlelight and Dirty Fingers, or Royal Virtue in Disguise: Some Thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalcken," *Simiolus* 11 (1980): 23–38; and Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Maarssen and The Hague, 1989), 182–216.
8. For the dated genre pieces, see Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 143 (1667), 151 (1669), 160 (1682), and 168 (1690). To these we should perhaps add the small painting of 1692 in Toronto; see entry GS-112, fig. 1. The history paintings date from

1690, 1691 and 1700; see Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 10, 19, 34, 37, and 40–41.

9. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 47.
10. The canvas of 161 x 274.5 cm was painted in 1679; Gerard Lemmens and Peter B. M. Sliedenbeek, *De Vrede van Nijmegen (1678–1679)* (Nijmegen, 1978), 59–64 with illustrations.
11. The exceptional engraving contains the thesis with which Louis-Nicolas and Louis-François Le Tellier obtained their doctorates on 28 July 1684 at the Collège d'Harcourt in Paris; José Lothe, *L'oeuvre gravé de François et Nicolas de Poilly d'Abbeville, graveurs parisiens du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1994), 236–37, no. 371 with illustration. In all likelihood Schalcken knew this unique print through the Flemish engraver and art dealer Jan van der Bruggen (1649–ca. 1699), who was living in Paris in those years. Schalcken's *Recognition of Constance* (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) was taken to Paris by Van der Bruggen, who never paid for it. This gave rise to a number of legal entanglements that occurred between 1688 and 1691; Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Maarssen and The Hague, 1989), 190–93. Van der Bruggen and the engraver François de Poilly were next-door neighbors on Rue Saint-Jacques; José Lothe, *L'oeuvre gravé de François et Nicolas de Poilly d'Abbeville, graveurs parisiens du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1994), 373.
12. This is a small oval portrait of Françoisia, which, given its dark blue background, must be dated to Schalcken's London years, 1692–96. It was sold as the portrait of an anonymous lady by someone in the "Circle of Schalcken" at Christie's in Amsterdam on 22 September 2009, lot 132 with color illustration. However, the portrait bears Schalcken's monogram at the lower left center. Dr. Eddy Schavemaker and the present author identified the sitter as the wife of the painter on the basis of her portrait of 1706; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 59 with color illustration. In fact, Françoisia's ninth child, Godefridus, was baptized on 3 February 1697 in The Hague, which suggests that Schalcken and his family had already left England by the end of 1696, since it stands to reason that he would not have exposed his heavily pregnant wife to the dangers of such a journey.
13. Cf. Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis, 2000–1) (New Haven, 2000), nos. 1, 3, 7, 20, and 29.
14. Henri Pauwels et al., *Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België, Departement Oude Kunst, inventaris catalogus van de oude schilderkunst* (Brussels, 1984), 92, inv. no. 86.

Provenance

- Private collection (sale, Christie's, London, 18 April 1832, no. 57) [£2.2 to Pennell].
- Giles Sebright, Bart (his sale, Christie's, London, 2 July 1937, no. 130).
- Private collection (sale, Christie's, London, 4 March 1938, no. 66).
- [Galerie Lingenauber, Düsseldorf, by 1988, unpaginated, with ill.].
- [Galerie Edel, Cologne, 1988].
- Private collection (sale, Hampel Fine Art Auctions, 8 December 2006, no. 310).
- [Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam, 2006].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, "De Zichtbaere Werelt: Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad," 29 November 1992–28 February 1993, no. 72.
- Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Fondation Corboud, "Wettstreit der Künste: Malerei und Skulptur von Dürer bis Daumier," 25 May–25 August 2002, no. 121.
- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, September 2009–September 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, "Schalcken–Gemalte Verführung," 25 September 2015–24 January 2016; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, 21 February–26 June 2016, no. 14 [lent by the present owner].
- Paris, Musée du Louvre, "Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection: The Age of Rembrandt," 22 February–22 May 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].

References

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- Mai, Ekkehard and Wettengl, Kurt. *Wettstreit der Künste: Malerei und Skulptur von Dürer bis Daumier*. Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Fondation Corboud. Wolfratshausen, 2002, 331, no. 121.
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- Franits, Wayne. *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution*. New Haven and London, 2004, 247–49, no. 227.
- Cook, Nicole Elizabeth. “Eros, Intimität und Begehren in den Genrebildern von Godefridus Schalcken.” In *Schalcken—Gemalte Verführung*. Edited by Anja K. Sevcik. Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum. Stuttgart, 2015, 81–84.
- Jansen, Guido M. C. “Ein Mann und eine Frau betrachten beim Schein einer Lampe eine Venus-Statue, 1685–90.” In *Schalcken—Gemalte Verführung*. Edited by Anja K. Sevcik. Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum. Stuttgart, 2015, 122–24, no. 14.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of coarse, plain-weave fabric, has been lined. All four tacking margins have been almost entirely removed, and narrow remnants of primed fabric remain. Cusping along the upper edge only suggests the support has been cut from a larger primed fabric. There is one paper label but no wax collection seals, stencils, or import stamps along the lining or stretcher.

The fabric has been pre-primed with a gray ground followed by a light red ground applied below the composition area. The paint is applied with thin layers of transparent glazes that refine the effects of light and the transitions into shadow, and with broader scumbles along the folds of the artist’s proper right sleeve.

No carbon-based underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 900–1700 nanometers or in the X-radiograph.^[1]

A faint signature located in the lower right corner is visible in the X-radiograph but not under normal light conditions or in infrared images.^[2]

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2008 and remains in a good state of preservation



despite areas of thinness and fine drying cracks through the background.^[3]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Using an Indigo Systems Merlin Near Infrared camera, with a solid-state InGaAs (Indium Gallium Arsenide) detector sensitive to wavelengths from 0.9 to 1.7 microns.
2. It may be a double signature.
3. Entry based on examination report written by Sophie Scully, graduate intern, Paintings Conservation Department, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.