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**Young Man Reading**

Jacob van Loo  
(Sluis 1614 – 1670 Paris)

ca. 1650

oil on panel

48.5 x 38.6 cm

signed in highlight and shadow, in light and dark  
paint, lower left: "I.V.Loo."

JvL-100

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



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When Jacob van Loo turned his brush to the human figure, his subject was usually the female nude.<sup>[1]</sup> He was known for orienting these nudes on a vertical canvas and enveloping them in soft light that allowed shadows to dance across the exquisitely rendered fabrics barely covering their luminous skin.<sup>[2]</sup> He nuanced their gestures and facial expressions so much that one could easily imagine their thoughts and personalities. With a similar sensitivity to his subject's psychological character, Van Loo captures in this evocative painting the intent concentration of a young man reading.

The young man, who sits on a chest or bench as he leans on a box that resembles a foot warmer (**fig 1**), grips the sides of his thin book or manuscript, the spine of which he has fully inverted, as he carefully studies the text. Van Loo has focused on the figure far more than on the room in which the youth sits. The floor-to-ceiling wood panels and wooden doors and simple wooden floor create a visual symphony of tonal browns, but these varied architectural forms are difficult to interpret either spatially or functionally. The youth does not appear to sit in a normal room of a house, but perhaps in a transitional space between the inside and outside, such as a mud room or entrance hall. The objects hanging on the wall partially covered by cloths appear to be violins or violas. Perhaps the young man is waiting for a music lesson, and is here pictured using his last few minutes of free time to study a musical score.

Although the room is rather indeterminate, the young man's clothing is fashionable. His brass-buttoned jacket, knee-length pants with piping around the openings, and tall white knee socks reflect a French-inspired style popular in the late 1640s and early 1650s.<sup>[3]</sup> Among youths at this time, it was also in vogue to leave only the upper part of the jacket buttoned so as to reveal part of the white shirt underneath. Though hats varied little during the seventeenth century, by the 1650s they did tend to be taller and more cylindrical, as is the hat resting beside the young man that presumably belongs to him.<sup>[4]</sup> A dating of around 1650 for this painting thus seems probable. This dating is also consistent with the results of the dendochronological analysis of the panel, which indicates a felling date of around 1635 (see technical notes).

Given the young man's stylish attire, it is plausible that he is preparing for a music lesson. Music was a passion of the privileged elite, and Dutch

## Comparative Figures



**Fig 1.** Detail of foot warmer in Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid* (detail), ca. 1660, oil on canvas, 45.5 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-2344



**Fig 2.** Jacob van Loo, *Musical Company*, ca. 1665/66, oil on canvas, 73.3 x 66 cm, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, inv. no. 1930.47



**Fig 3.** Gerrit Dou, *Prince Rupert of the Palatinate and an Elderly Man (Probably His Teacher) as Samuel and Eli*, 1631/1632, oil on canvas, 102.9 x 88.7 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 84.PA.570



artists often depicted musical themes. Typically, however, artists focused on musical ensembles already engaged in the act rather than musicians preparing for a lesson, as it offered the opportunity to show amorous interactions between men and women given that the playing of music metaphorically referred to the unison of lovers' hearts. It was an image Van Loo himself would depict in the mid-1660s (**fig 2**).

*Young Man Reading* is not only unusual among genre images featuring music, but also among those depicting figures reading books. Generally, those reading books (as opposed to letters) in Dutch art are elderly women,<sup>[5]</sup> scholars in their studios,<sup>[6]</sup> or saints, such as Saint Paul or Saint Jerome.<sup>[7]</sup> Occasionally one finds depictions of young boys reading books in the presence of a mentor or instructor, but these are few in number(**fig 3**).<sup>[8]</sup> In this regard, Van Loo's painting occupies a special place in the genre of reading imagery. Not a scholar, saint, or young man receiving instruction, it is an image of the true joy and the pleasure of a book and its ability to captivate and engross.

-Alexandra Libby



## Endnotes

1. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3, 172; Albert Blankert, ed., *Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Paintings* (Exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen; Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut) (Rotterdam, 1999), no. 26.
2. Wayne Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven, 2004), 176.
3. J. H. Der Kinderen-Besier, *Spelevaart der Mode: De Kledij onzer voorouders in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1950), 135.
4. J. H. Der Kinderen-Besier, *Spelevaart der Mode: De Kledij onzer voorouders in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1950), 137.
5. Examples of old women reading are found in the oeuvres of Gerrit Dou (1613–75), Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), and Ferdinand Bol (1616–80), among others. See 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) (New Haven, 2000), no. 2, 66–67; Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 1, 1625–1631, ed. Josua Bruyn et al. (The Hague, Boston, and London, 1982), 1:356; and Sabine Schulze et al., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) (Stuttgart, 1993), no. 7, 142–43.
6. For examples by Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723) and Gerrit Dou, see Volker Manuth, ed., *Wisdom, Knowledge and Magic: The Image of the Scholar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Exh. cat. Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre) (Kingston, 1997), no. 9, 44–45; and Sabine Schulze et al., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) (Stuttgart, 1993), no. 23, 178–79.
7. Jan Lievens (1607–74) painted an image of Saint Paul (see Volker Manuth, ed., *Wisdom, Knowledge and Magic: The Image of the Scholar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* [Exh. cat. Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre] [Kingston, 1997], no. 23, 64–65) and Hendrick Bloemaert (ca. 1601–72) painted an image of Saint Jerome (see Sabine Schulze et al., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* [Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt] [Stuttgart, 1993], no. 5, 136–39). In images of the four Evangelists, Saint Mark is usually portrayed reading. See Hendrick ter Brugghen's (1588–1629) *St. John* in Sabine Schulze et al., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) (Stuttgart, 1993), no. 18, 164–65, 167.

8. Jan Lievens also produced an image of such tutelage. See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2009), no. 29, 138–39.

## Provenance

- Antoine Delacoux de Marivault (Marivaux) (sale, Paris, 27 January–3 February 1806, no. 31; sale, Paris, 10–11 June 1806, no. 58).
- Frédéric Quilliet, Paris (his sale, Paris, 15–17 April 1818, no. 200).
- Charles Auguste Louis Joseph de Morny, Duc de Morny (1811–65) (pseud. M. de Saint-Rémy), by 1839.
- Dufraisne collection, Cambrai, by 1876.
- Anatole Demidoff (1813–70), Principe di San Donato, Villa Demidoff, Palais de San Donato, Florence; by descent to his nephew Paul Demidoff (1839–1925) (his sale, 15 March–13 April 1880, no. 1100).
- Private collection.
- [Wildenstein & Co., New York, 2007; Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam, 2007].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

## Exhibition History

- Angers, Societe d'Agriculture, des Sciences et Arts d'Angers, "Exposition de Peinture et Sculpture Anciennes," 31 May–30 June 1839, no. 793 and no. 16 [lent by Duc de Morny (pseud. M. de Saint-Rémy)].
- Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, August 2009–November 2016 [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

- Societe d'Agriculture, Sciences et Arts d'Angers. *Exposition de Peinture et Sculpture Anciennes*. Exh. cat. supplement vol., Angers, 1839, 68, no. 793.
- Societe d'Agriculture, Sciences et Arts d'Angers. *Souvenirs de l'Exposition de Peinture et Sculpture Anciennes de 1839*. With illustrations by Pierre Hawke. Angers, 1840, 31–32, no. 16.
- Michiels, Alfred. *Histoire de la peinture flamande depuis ses debuts jusqu'en 1864*. 2nd revised edition. 10 vols. Paris, 1876, 10:34.
- Von Würzbach, Alfred. *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon; Auf Grund archivalischer Forschungen bearbeitet*. Vienna and Leipzig, 1910, 2:64.
- Fredericksen, Burton B., and Peronnet, Benjamin et al., eds. *Répertoire des tableaux vendus en France au XIXe siècle*. 1 vol. to date. Los Angeles, 1998, 1:650.
- Mandrella, David. *Jacob van Loo, 1614–1670*. Paris, 2011, 25, no. 29, 26, 76, 78, 138–39.

## Versions

### Versions and Copies

1. Pierre Hawke, after Jacob van Loo, *L'Étudiant*, line engraving, in *Souvenirs de l'Exposition de Peinture et Sculpture Anciennes de 1839* (Angers, 1840), no. 16.

### Versions Notes

## Technical Summary

The support is a rectangular composite panel comprised of two radially cut, vertically grained Baltic oak planks of different widths. The vertical panel join is located to the right of center and passes through the figure's proper left thigh. The planks derive from the same tree with an earliest fell date of 1627, and the painting may be given a plausible creation date from 1635 on.<sup>[1]</sup> The panel has been thinned and cradled and oak blocks have been inserted between the upper and lower ends of the vertical cradle members to reinforce the support. There are two



paper labels and two handwritten inscriptions, but no wax seals, import stamps, stencils, machine toolmarks or panel maker's marks.

A creamy white ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The paint has been applied thinly and smoothly along the majority of the painting and with more refined, opaque, slightly raised brushwork along the highlights of the flesh tones, the white of the shirt, stockings, and decorative details of the hat of the seated figure, and along the edge of the book being read. The figure's garment folds have been created using varying paint translucency, and the highlights of the jacket and trousers have been created by allowing the light-colored ground to show through the thin brown wash, which contrasts with the darker opaque areas of browns and grays.

The painting is signed in highlight and shadow in light and dark paint along the lower left corner, but is undated.

Infrared images captured at 900–1700 nanometers detected underdrawing along the figure's chin and hands. Dark lines along the upper contour of the drapery at the far left and short lines around it appear to be above the paint, not underdrawn. Underpainting appears as a very loosely painted dark shape where the door is presently located, possibly suggesting a fabric previously hung to the right of the door. A pentimento along the boy's proper right foot indicates it was originally smaller and located slightly higher.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2007 and remains in good condition.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Peter Klein's 2011 dendrochronology report and an unsigned and undated (possibly August 2011) examination report prepared by the Paintings Conservation Department, J. Paul Getty Museum.
2. Entry based on an examination report prepared by Yvonne Szafran, head of paintings conservation, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2011, and additional information provided by e-mail by Devi Ormond, associate paintings conservator, J. Paul Getty Museum.