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Boy Offering Grapes to a Woman

Maria Schalcken
(Made? 1645/50 – before 1700 Dordrecht)

ca. 1675–82
oil on panel
35.6 x 26.7 cm
signed, upper left: “Schalcken . F.”
GS-113

How to cite

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This painting, which has always been attributed to Godefridus Schalcken (1643–1706), shows a young woman in sumptuous dress, sitting in front of a red curtain and seen from the knees upward. In her left hand she holds a closed fan, while reaching out with her right hand toward a bunch of grapes in a large wicker basket filled with white, red and blue bunches of this delicacy, which a boy offers her. In the right background is a view of a walled garden with an impressive fountain and tall trees, beyond which high mountains rise. The signature “Schalcken . F” at the upper left appears in a piece of blue sky where the curtain sags. Not only is this a rather unusual place for Godefridus Schalcken to have put his signature, but the absence of his first initial, G, is certainly uncommon.

A comparison of this painting with works considered typical of Schalcken reveals additional anomalies. The detailing of the woman’s clothing and particularly the wicker basket is somewhat hard and lacks the soft touch we expect to see from this master. The anatomy of the boy’s head is not entirely correct, and a background landscape with a mountainous vista appears nowhere else in Schalcken’s oeuvre. The painting therefore seems to have been produced in Schalcken’s studio by a pupil or an assistant.

The attribution of the painting can be pinpointed more exactly thanks to the capital F in the signature. This signature, as well as its placement, is identical to that on Maria Schalcken’s *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, now in the Van Otterloo collection **(fig 1)**.[1] Though Godefridus occasionally placed an F after his name as an abbreviation for *fecit*, he did so using a small S-like letter.[2] On *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, not only did Maria sign her name in full, but she also wrote the same capital F we find on the present painting. The space in front of the signature on *Boy Offering Grapes to a Woman* is, moreover, large enough to have accommodated Maria’s Christian name. Thus it is reasonable to assume that it was not Godefridus, but rather Maria—his sister and pupil (and junior by several years)—who painted *Boy Offering Grapes to a Woman*, even if her brushstrokes are somewhat broader and less accomplished than in her *Self-Portrait at the Easel*. The absence of Maria’s Christian name in the signature could then be blamed on a former owner, who evidently thought it might prove more profitable to let it pass for a work by Godefridus.

Maria Schalcken presumably studied with her brother from 1665 to 1670, after he had completed his training in Gerrit Dou’s studio and returned from Leiden to Dordrecht, where he moved back in with his parents in the Nieuwstraat (see GS-101).[3] She thus became Godefridus’s first pupil (see GS-106). A century and a half ago, her work had already been described by Immerzeel as rare.[4] Her painting career cannot have lasted very long, and she would never have had to paint for a living. It is

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Maria Schalcken, *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, 1662–99, oil on panel, 39.6 × 31.6 cm, Eijk and Rose-Marie van Otterloo Collection

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likely that after her marriage in 1682 to the Dordrecht merchant Severijn van Bracht (b. 1658), she never touched her brushes again, because one year later she gave birth to a daughter, Anna, and in 1685 to a son, Cornelis.[5] Van Bracht had his *banns* read again in July 1700, so by then he must have been a widower and Maria must have died some time before that. Therefore, Maria's painting activities should be placed mainly in the 1670s.[6]

In addition to *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, there is one other known painting by Maria's hand, *Interior with a Young Lady Seated, Powdering Her Hair*, a small panel documented in 1979 in the London art trade.[7] Furthermore, there are a number of listings of paintings by her in old sale catalogues. These refer to two genre pieces, *Woman at Her Toilet, Eating Comfits* (*Een Vrouwtje dat voor haar Toilet sit Confituuren eetende*) and *Drunken Woman and a Young Boy in a Room* (*Een dronk Wyf en een Jongetje in een Vertrek*), as well as the aforementioned *Young Lady Seated*.[8]

- Guido Jansen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Frederik Duparc et al., *Golden: Dutch and Flemish Masterworks from the Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo Collection* (exh. cat. Salem, Peabody Essex Museum; San Francisco, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Houston, Museum of Fine Arts) (New Haven, 2011), 279–81, no. 57, with outdated biographical information. For a more up-to-date biography of Maria, see the online note by Marloes Huiskamp.
2. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 104, 130, 131, and 149. According to Beherman, the signature on his no. 4, the *Holy Family* in Frankfurt, is followed by a capital F, but illustration no. 457 in Mirjam Neumeister and Leon Krempel, *Holländische Gemälde im Städel 1550–1800*, 3 vols. (Petersburg, 2005), 3: 408, shows it to be a lowercase F. According to the RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) website, Schalcken's *Self-Portrait*, now in the Dordrechts Museum (RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) kunstwerkno. 13042), bears a capital F, but in this case, too, Schalcken in fact used the small s-like letter F. As far as I could discover, these are the only instances in which Schalcken signed his work with an F after his name.
3. Cornelis Schalcken (1610–74) and Aletta Lydius (1612–after 1674) married in Heusden in 1636 and would have eight children: Balthasar (1637–79), Anna (1638–80), Godefridus (1643–1706), Maria (ca. 1645–before 1700), Cornelis (ca. 1650–1709), Aletta (1654–1700), Barbara (ca. 1655–1709), and Johannes (1660–1724).
4. Johannes Immerzeel, *De levens en werken der hollandsche en vlaamschkunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters, van het begin der vijftiende eeuw tot heden…*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1842–43), 3: 59.
5. Maria and Severijn had their *banns* read on 26 July 1682, which means that the marriage must have taken place several weeks later. Gemeentearchief Dordrecht (now the Regionaal Archief Dordrecht), ONA 20.243 (unnumbered). This date is not provided in the online note by Marloes Huiskamp.
6. Professor Peter Klein, who subjected the current painting to dendrochronological examination in July 2012, came to the conclusion that "an earliest felling date can be derived for the year 1640. . . . With a minimum of 2 years for seasoning an earliest creation of the painting is possible from 1642 upwards. Under the assumption of a median of 17 sapwood rings and 2 years for seasoning a creation is plausible from 1652 upwards." Apparently it was more than 20 years before the panel was actually put to use.
7. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 47 (ill.). Royal Academy of Arts, *Trafalgar Galleries at the Royal Academy II* (exh. cat London, Trafalgar Galleries at the Royal Academy of Arts) (London, 1979), 46–47, with color illustration; oil on panel, 36.2 x 26.2 cm. The work is signed in full "Maria . Schalcken . F ." in the lower left-hand corner, exactly as on her *Self-Portrait*.
8. The woman eating comfits (oil on panel, approx. 50 x 40 cm) was first recorded at the sale in The Hague

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of the collection of Seger Tierens, 23 July 1743 (lot 167); on 21 May 1790 the piece was put up for auction again in The Hague (lot 165); RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) excerpts nos. 1483885 and 1483896. The drunken woman on a panel of approximately the same dimensions first surfaced at the sale on 7 November 1768 in Dordrecht (lot 7) and was later included in the sale of the Cornelis van Heemskerck collection, which was held on 18 November 1783 in The Hague (lot 13). It subsequently belonged to the Jacques Bergeon collection, which was auctioned off on 4 November 1789 in The Hague (lot 59); RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) excerpts nos. 1483891, 1483894, and 1483892, all with much more detailed descriptions of the painting than the one given in the 1768 catalogue. The portrait of a young girl (oil on panel, 28 x 21 cm) was part of the collection of Count F. de Robiano, which was sold in Brussels on 1 May 1837 (lot 594). The same painting was described in detail in July 1922 by Hofstede de Groot, who also noted that an attempt had been made to pass it off as the work of Godefridus; RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) excerpts nos. 1483888 and 1483895.

Provenance

- Possibly Arthur Kay, Glasgow (his sale, Christie's, London, 11 May 1911, no. 224, as by Godefridus Schalcken [to Roos for £12.12]).[1]
- (Sale, Sotheby's, Monaco, 2 December 1989, no. 319, as by Godefridus Schalcken [for 721,500 francs].
- [Richard Green Fine Paintings, London, 1992 (sale, Christie's, London, 23 April 1993, no. 8, as by Godefridus Schalcken).]
- Dr. Hinrich Bischoff, Bremen and Berlin, until 2005; on consignment with Galerie Heide Hübner, Würzburg, June 1993–March 1994, as by Godefridus Schalcken; on consignment with Klaus Edel, Cologne and London, 1995, as by Godefridus Schalcken (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 15 June 2006, as by Godefridus Schalcken).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006..

Provenance Notes

1. The sale of Arthur Kay's collection in 1911 included *A Boy and Girl, with a Dish of Fruit*, oil on canvas, 41.9 x 33 cm. Hofstede de Groot subsequently included this listing in his entry. However, the Leiden Collection work is on panel and measures 35.6 x 26.7 cm. It is possible that the Arthur Kay painting represents an unknown prototype or variant by Godefridus Schalcken.

Exhibition History

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- Washington, D.C., The National Museum of Women in the Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, 1 August 2018–10 October 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Washington, D.C., The National Museum of Women in the Arts, "Woman Artists of the Dutch Golden Age," 11 October 2019–5 January 2020 [lent by the present owner].
- Washington, D.C., The National Museum of Women in the Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, 6 January–31 July 2021 [lent by the present owner].
- Baltimore, Baltimore Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, October 2023–January 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H'ART Museum, "From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, "Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

References

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- Nogrady, Elizabeth. "Godfried Schalcken, *Boy Offering Grapes to a Woman*." In *Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady et al., 156, ill. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H'ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art. Zwolle, 2025. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]
- Van der Heijden, Janny. "Food in Rembrandt's Day." In *Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady et al., 38–39, fig. 3. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H'ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art. Zwolle, 2025. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

Technical Summary

The support is a single oak board from Western Germany or the Netherlands. Dendrochronological analysis indicates an earliest-possible creation date of 1642, with a more plausible date of 1652 onward.[1] The panel

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retains its original beveled back and measures about one half inch at the thickest point. On the reverse are two labels, two wax seals, and an inscription in black that reads “DxDx.” The panel, with the grain oriented vertically, has a mild convex warp. The edges do not appear to have been trimmed.[2]

The panel was prepared with an off-white ground, followed by a brick-red colored priming layer.[3] Examination with infrared reflectography did not reveal any underdrawing.[4]

The paint was applied with softly blended brushstrokes, allowing the artist to distinguish between textures. Impastoed paint was employed sparingly to emphasize details such as the woven basket bearing the grapes and the white ruffles of the woman’s dress. A warm brown underpaint was used to sketch thinly in some areas of the initial composition beneath the body color. There is a small pentimento above the woman’s head that relates to a change in her head covering.[5]

The painting is generally in excellent condition. There is some minor craquelure in the dark brown passages, revealing the red priming below. There are also some vertical cracks, following the grain of the wood, that appear raised in raking light but are stable.[6]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Wood identification and dendrochronological analysis completed by Peter Klein, Hamburg University, 23 July 2018. “The youngest heartwood ring was formed out in the year 1633. Regarding the sapwood statistic of Western Europe an earliest felling date can be derived for the year 1640, more plausible is a felling date between 1640 [and] 1650 [or] 1656 + x. With a minimum of two years for seasoning an earliest creation of the painting is possible from 1642 upwards. Under the assumption of a median of seventeen sapwood rings and two years for seasoning a creation is plausible from 1652 upwards.”
2. It is difficult to confirm, as 3/8-inch-thick wood strips have been tacked onto all four edges.
3. There may be a thin light gray priming layer between the white ground and the red layer.
4. The painting was scanned using a Merlin Indigo InGaAs near-infrared camera with a StingRay macro lens customized for the wavelengths covered by the camera, 0.9 to 1.7 microns, July 2018.
5. This is only somewhat apparent in normal viewing conditions.
6. Entry based on a 2018 examination report by Sophie Scully, Paintings Conservation Department, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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