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Young Boy, Dressed in a Blue Robe, Holding a Lighted Torch

Godefridus Schalcken
(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

ca. 1692
brown ink, gray and blue washes, red chalk, black chalk underdrawing
13.8 x 11 cm
initialed in brown ink, lower left, watermark fragment, lower left
GS-112

How to cite

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The least known aspect of Godefridus Schalcken's fairly extensive oeuvre is his work on paper. In addition to six prints, about 30 drawings have survived, mostly executed in red or black chalk and sometimes in pen and ink. A remarkable characteristic of these sheets is that almost all of them are portraits; moreover, they can often be connected with painted works, many examples of which have been pointed out by Beherman. Evidently Schalcken reached for his drawing stylus whenever clients asked him to paint their portraits. He must have begun to produce these drawings in the mid-1670s, around the time he was starting to make a name for himself as a portraitist. He continued this practice throughout his career.[1] These portrait studies are striking in that there is practically no difference in style between the earliest and the latest known drawings: Schalcken clearly preferred to use chalk, and kept to the uniform style of hatching that constitutes another unchanging characteristic of his drawings.

The same unvarying style and materials can be seen in the rare studies Schalcken made in preparation for his genre paintings. One such sheet is *Maid Blowing on Hot Coals for a Foot-Warmer*, a red-chalk drawing made as a study for the painting in Braunschweig.[2] Another example is an elaborate drawing in black chalk of *Young Woman with a Burning Candle, Sitting in an Interior*, made in preparation for the painting in Dresden.[3] *Maid Blowing on Hot Coals* even bears a monogram, showing that Schalcken considered such sheets suitable for sale, which was certainly not true of his much sketchier portrait studies. Nevertheless, it is easy to see why the artist's drawn oeuvre is so little known, for though it is skillfully executed, most of it is rather dry and unappealing.[4]

It is therefore all the more unusual to find a drawing such as the present study that shows a more sparkling—and hitherto unknown—colorful side to the artist's drawn oeuvre. *Young Boy, Dressed in a Blue Robe, Holding a Lighted Torch* is obviously more sketchy in character. Moreover, the drawing is rendered in a technique not previously encountered in Schalcken's work. He began this drawing in the usual way, using red and black chalk. On top of this, he loosely accentuated the most important contours with a pen and then, in a new departure, filled in the forms with gray and blue wash rapidly applied with the brush.[5] The result is an extremely lively drawing, which outshines almost all of his other works on paper.

This previously unpublished sheet appears to be a study for *Boy Holding a Torch* in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto **(fig 1)**,[6] a small painting on

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Boy Holding a Torch,* 1692, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 21.3 cm, The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, #97/3

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canvas supposedly dated 1692, a detail unconfirmed by the museum but certainly in keeping with the style of the work.[7] Interestingly, there are many small differences between the drawing and the painting, which cannot be said of the drawing and painting of *Maid Blowing on Hot Coals for a Foot-Warmer*. In the Leiden Collection painting, the position of his head has been changed, and other differences from the drawing can be detected in his clothing and in the trees in the background. The most salient modifications are those made to the musical instruments at the lower right. In the drawing, the flute and what is probably a violoncello are placed considerably higher and more prominently than in the painting.

The provenance of the painting in Toronto goes back only to 1992–93.[8] It can be identified, however, as the "portrait of Banister, the musician when twelve years old. In blue robes, holding a lighted candle, in a landscape," which was sold at auction in London in 1941, after presumably being in the possession of the same family since the eighteenth century.[9] It is, however, inconceivable that the painting, and therefore the drawing as well, portrays the English violinist and composer John Banister (ca. 1624–79),[10] as he died long before Schalcken visited London for the first time. Yet this interpretation, which undoubtedly stems from the nineteenth century, suggests that such a scene—combining a boy holding a burning torch in a wooded landscape and several musical instruments—was rather unusual and therefore demanded an explanation.

Considering that the painting was long owned by the same English family, it is quite possible that Schalcken produced both the painting and the preparatory drawing in London, perhaps soon after settling there with his family in the spring of 1692. This dating puts the uncommon drawing technique seen here in a different light. It is possible that Schalcken, with an eye to a new and particularly interesting market of English collectors, made the drawing more elaborate and applied a colorful wash to produce a sheet that was both attractive and easy to sell.

- Guido Jansen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. The black-chalk drawing preserved at the Hoge Raad van Adel (High Council of Nobility) in The Hague with the 1678 portrait of Govert van Slingelandt (1623–90) is the earliest example. The last portrait drawing represents the three brothers Le Leu de Wilhelm (Dordrechts Museum) and is a study in red chalk for the painting, dated 1702, in the Mauritshuis in The Hague. See Guido Jansen, “Additions to Godfried Schalcken’s Oeuvre as a Draftsman,” *The Hoogsteder Mercury* 13–14 (1992): 74–75, figs. 1 and 9.
2. This monogrammed drawing in red chalk (32.6 x 26.4 cm) was last seen in a sale at Sotheby’s in Amsterdam, 2 November 2004, lot 109, with illustration. Before this, it appeared at Sotheby’s in Amsterdam, 22 November 1989, lot 142, with illustration. It is a study for the painting in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 196.
3. This sheet, in black chalk (25.8 x 20.7 cm), was offered in an auction at Sotheby’s in London, 4 July 2007, lot 193, with illustration. The signature *G. Schalken fecit* is, however, of unknown origin. With regard to the painting in Dresden, see Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 279, fig. 184a, and, in particular, Harald Marx, *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Dresden,* 2 vols. (Cologne, 2005), 473, inv. no. 1656 (oil on panel, 26 x 20.5 cm).
4. In this context it is interesting to note Arnold Houbraken’s surprise at the fact that Carel de Moor (1655–1738) had become of pupil of Schalcken, “aangezien hy toenmaals de Tekenkonst al vry beter verstond dan Schalken” (since at that time he already understood the art of drawing rather better than Schalcken). Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1718–21), 3: 343. In his biography of Schalcken, Houbraken judged his brushwork to be equal to that of Adriaen van der Werff: “dog in opzigt van teekenen, zou ik hem zyn voetbank toe wyzen” (but with respect to drawing, I would point him towards his footstool); Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1718–21), 3: 177. It was already clear during his lifetime that drawing was not Schalcken’s forte.
5. In fact, Schalcken had wielded the brush earlier, an example being a refined portrait of a young woman, drawn in black chalk on parchment, an unusual and rather expensive support for a drawing by Schalcken. See Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. D26, with an incomplete description of the technique.
6. Purchased in 1997 from the art dealer Jack Kilgore, New York. Oil on canvas, 24.5 x 21.3 cm, inv. no. 97/3.
7. According to a note accompanying the photograph of the painting preserved at the RKD

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(Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) in The Hague, the painting is dated 1692, this having been communicated by the art dealer Jack Kilgore in New York. The website of the Art Gallery of Ontario gives a dating of “ca. 1692.”

8. In 1992 the painting was with the art dealer Rafael Valls in London, as stated in an advertisement in *Simiolus* 21 (1992): no. 4 (which appeared in April 1993). In March 1993 Valls exhibited the small painting, still unrestored, at the European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht.
9. Sale, London, Christie’s, 19 December 1941, lot 9; the measurements are given as 9 x 8 inches (22.8 x 20.3 cm). The painting came from the estate of Miss Agnes Emma Clayton East, who had died in October of that year as the last descendant of this branch of the family. The collection she had inherited apparently had come from Sir William East (1737/38–1819), 1st Baronet, whose daughter Mary East (ca. 1765–1833) married Sir William Clayton (1762–1834), 4th Baronet.
10. Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* vol. 14 (New York, 1998), 273.

Provenance

- Private collection, until 1992 [to Emanuel von Baeyer, London, until 2006].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, “Schalcken—Painted Seduction,” 25 September 2015–24 January 2016; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, 21 February–26 June 2016 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Jansen, Guido M. C. “Junge mit brennender Fackel, vermutlich John Banister III, um 1692.” In *Schalcken–Gemalte Verführung*. Edited by Anja K. Sevcik, 221–23, no. 52. Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum. Stuttgart, 2015.
- Franits, Wayne. *Godefridus Schalcken: A Dutch Painter in Late Seventeenth-Century London*. Amsterdam, 2018, 43–4, fig. 13, 169–70.

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Versions
Related Painting

1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Boy Holding a Torch,* oil on canvas, 24.2 x 21 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Technical Summary

The support, a white laid paper with a fragment of a watermark along the lower left, has been mounted on a white laid paper of greater thickness. The support has been trimmed on all four edges and along the lower left; the framing line has been partially cut off. The mount extends beyond the edges of the support on the left, right, and lower edges but has been trimmed along with the support to the framing line along the upper edge. Paper-making creases, which existed prior to the execution of the composition, are present in the blue washes on the left and have caused the brush to skip over the adjacent hollows, leaving a fine line of white paper reserve exposed.

Under magnification, particles of black chalk from an underdrawing are visible throughout the composition, as are continuous strokes of black chalk, notably in the background, the wrist of the boy's left arm, and his costume at the lower left and right. The drawing sequence continued with pen and brown ink followed by gray washes, the latter ranging from black to veil-like transparency and layered to produce varied gradations of tone. In the background on the right the gray washes slightly reduced the intensity of the brown ink strokes, presumably intended to create a more diffuse effect of distance. The blue wash was then applied, and finally the red chalk—more lightly in the hair and more heavily in the torch. The vibrant white paper provides an underlying luminosity to the colors, but the reserve areas also function as a contrasting component in the palette. The presence of a small but slightly lustrous area of gummed ink is visible at the lower right corner where the ink was not diluted by fluid washes.

The drawing is initialed in brown ink at the lower left.

The drawing has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition and remains in an excellent state of preservation.[1]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Entry based on 2012 examination report by Marjorie Shelley, Sherman Fairchild Conservator

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in Charge, Sherman Fairchild Center for Works on Paper and Photograph Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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