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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

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When Jacob van Loo turned his brush to the human figure, his subject was usually the female nude.[1] 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.[2] 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 has here captured the intense concentration of a young man reading.

The youth, who sits on a chest or bench while leaning on a foot warmer **(fig 1)**, grips a thin book or manuscript, the spine of which he has fully inverted, as he carefully studies its text. The room is entirely brown, with its floor-to-ceiling wood panels, doors, and floor, making it difficult to interpret either spatially or functionally. It may be a transitional space between the inside and outside, such as a mudroom or entrance hall to a home. Hanging on the wall are two musical instruments, probably a violin and a viola, that are partially covered by clothes, suggesting that the young man may be waiting for a music lesson, and the text he is studying is a musical score.

Music was a passion of the privileged elite, and the young man's fashionable clothing, indeed, identifies him as part of the upper class.[3] Typically, however, artists focused on musical ensembles already engaged in the act, rather than on a musician preparing for a lesson. Such scenes, including one depicted by Van Loo in the mid-1660s **(fig 2**), 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. Although Van Loo's decision to picture the boy studying is, thus, unusual, it was likely inspired by two of his previous works related to the composition: *Man Holding a Woman on His Knees*, which is signed and dated 1650, and *Scholar in His Study* from the early 1650s **(fig 3)**.[4] In the former work, a man and woman carouse in a wood-paneled room highly reminiscent of the space in *Young Man Reading*. In the latter work, a young scholar in a nearly identical pose toLeiden Collection young man sits in a room cluttered with papers, books, scientific instruments, and other curiosities, keeping with traditional representations of scholars and academics.

Despite the similarity of these works—especially the figure of the youth, whom Van Loo appears to have plucked from one composition for the other—each of the three scenes has a very different energy. The amorousness of the couple in *Man Holding a Woman on His Knees* and disorder of the scholar's room in *Scholar in His Study* endow the paintings with a dynamic energy that is entirely unlike the sense of quietude and contemplation that pervades *Young Man Reading*. That Van Loo executed the Leiden Collection work after the other paintings is confirmed by technical analysis. Infrared reflectography shows that the young man's proper right foot was originally smaller

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. Jacob van Loo, Scholar in His Study, early 1650s, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 85 cm, Schloss Ehrenburg, Coburg, Große Galerie, R10, inv. no. E M 47.

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and located slightly higher than that of the youth in *Scholar in His Study*. Van Loo, perhaps utilizing a now-lost preliminary drawing, revised the boy's position when making this work (see technical notes).[5]

The tranquil isolation of the figure in *Young Man Reading* is also unusual in its focus on a young man reading by himself. Occasionally in Dutch art one finds depictions of young boys reading books in the presence of a mentor or instructor **(fig 4)**, but these are few in number.[6] Generally, individuals reading books (as opposed to letters) are elderly women,[7] scholars in their studies,[8] or saints, such as Paul or Jerome.[9] Van Loo's painting thus occupies a special place in genre imagery of reading. Showing neither scholar, nor saint, nor student, it is a representation of the joy and pleasure of reading, and its ability to captivate and engross the mind.



Fig 4. 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

- Alexandra Libby, 2017; revised in 2018

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Endnotes

1. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1718–21; revised edition published in The Hague, 1753; reprinted in Amsterdam, 1980), 3, 172; Albert Blankert, et al., *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. 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 1650s. It was also in vogue at that time to button only the upper part of the jacket so as to reveal the white shirt underneath. The style of the hat resting beside the young man, with its tall, cylindrical shape, is characteristic of the 1650s. See, J.H. Der Kinderen-Besier, *Spelevaart der Mode: De Kledij onzer voorouders in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1950), 135, 137.
4. *Scholar in His Study* was previously attributed (with question) to the artist Mattheus von Helmont by Herbert Brunner and Lorenz Zeelig in *Coburg Schloss Ehrenburg* (Munich, 1990), 53–54, repro. However, David Mandrella has convincingly given the painting to Van Loo in his catalogue raisonné. See David Mandrella, *Jacob van Loo, 1614–1670* (Paris, 2011), 138, no. P.28; on *Man Holding a Woman on His Knees*, see 136, no. P.24. Mandrella's entry on Leiden Collection painting says that the painting dates to the early 1660s (138–9, no. P.29). However, correspondence with the author confirms that this date is a typo and ought to have read early 1650s, as it does in the author's essay on the artist (78).
5. The boy may depict an individual also depicted by Van Loo's brother-in-law, the portraitist Martinus Lengele (d. 1668). See Martinus Lengele, *Portrait of a Young Man Wearing Armor*, oil on canvas, 70 x 55.4 cm, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague, inv. no. 301.
6. For Jan Lievens (1607–74), see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.ed., *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered* (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2009), 138–39, no. 29.
7. 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 in *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), 66–67, no. 2; Josua Bruyn et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 1: *1625–1631*, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague,1982), 356; and Sabine Schulze, ed., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle) (Frankfurt,

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1993), 142–43, no. 7.

8. For examples by Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723) and Gerrit Dou, see Volker Manuth, *Wisdom, Knowledge and Magic: The Image of the Scholar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Exh. cat. Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre) (Kingston, 1997), 44–45, no. 9; and Sabine Schulze, ed., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) (Stuttgart, 1993), no. 23, 178–79, no. 23.
9. 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, no. 23), and Hendrick Bloemaert (ca. 1601–72) painted an image of Saint Jerome (see Sabine Schulze, ed., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* [Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt] [Stuttgart, 1993], no. 5, 136–39, no. 5). In images of the four Evangelists, Saint Mark is usually portrayed reading. See Hendrick ter Brugghen's (1588–1629) St. John in Sabine Schulze, ed., *Leselust: Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) (Stuttgart, 1993), no. 18, 164–65, 167.

Provenance

- Antoine Delacoux de Marivault (Marivaux) (1771–1846), Paris (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).
- Sale, Paris, 2–3 May 1833, no. 101.
- Charles Auguste Louis Joseph de Morny, Duc de Morny (1811–1865) (pseud. M. de Saint-Rémy), by 1839.
- Dufraisne collection, Cambrai, by 1876.
- Anatole Demidoff (1812–1870), Principe di San Donato, Villa Demidoff, Palais de San Donato, Florence; by descent to his nephew Paul Demidoff (1839–1885) (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

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- 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, Museé 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].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Albany, Albany Institute of History & Art, "Delights of the Senses: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life. Featuring Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 14 September–31 December 2024, no. 6 [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].

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- Ducos, Blaise, and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, eds. *Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre*. Exh. cat. Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi. London, 2019, 156, no. 76. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]
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by Elizabeth Nogrady et al., 28, fig. 1. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H'ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art. Zwolle, 2025. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

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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.

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.[1] 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

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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.[2]

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.

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