



A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord

Gerrit Dou
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1665
oil on panel with arched top
33.5 x 25.3 cm
GD-117



How to cite

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In this intimate interior space, a young woman enjoys the sweet pleasures of playing the clavichord. Interrupted from her music, she pauses and turns toward the viewer as her fingers linger over the keyboard, several of them still delicately gracing the top of its keys. Her confident pose and alert demeanor suggest this is a song she has played many times before, its melody reverberating in the air and inviting us to join in her private performance.

Gerrit Dou's *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* recently resurfaced after more than two centuries in German royal collections descended from Frederick the Great (1712–86), the King of Prussia.^[1] An exciting rediscovery within the artist's oeuvre,^[2] the painting typifies Dou's refined genre scenes from the 1660s. During this period, like a number of his contemporaries, he expanded his subject matter to include figures in elegant domestic settings and, particularly, the activities of upper-class young women.^[3] In this work, Dou situated the woman close to the foreground and turned in a three-quarter pose, with a tapestry pulled open behind her, framing her form against the darkened interior.^[4] She is elegantly dressed in a fur-trimmed jacket, a pearl necklace, and earrings, with ribbons of red, blue, and yellow tied into her hair. Light enters the room through a window at the left and illuminates her round, flushed cheeks, button nose, and distinctive, heart-shaped mouth. It also strikes the soft folds of the oriental carpet on the table, highlighting the back of the clavichord and the thin, red-orange string used to hold the lid in its proper position.^[5]

Dou depicted a woman playing the same instrument in two other closely related works from around 1665, *A Woman Playing a Clavichord* in the Dulwich Picture Gallery (**fig 1**) and *Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* (**fig 2**) in a private collection.^[6] In the spacious interior of the Dulwich painting, Dou included a number of motifs—among them a viola da gamba, flute, opened music book, and glass of wine—that symbolically relate to themes of love and harmony.^[7] In the background of *Young Woman Playing a Clavichord*, Dou included a secondary scene of figures enjoying the sensual pleasures of eating and drinking, which casts a different light on the woman's music making by situating it in a moment of shared revelry.^[8] The absence of such symbolic and narrative motifs in the Leiden Collection painting shifts the focus of the composition to the woman's direct and steady engagement with the viewer. This approach, in addition to her more distinctive facial features, distinguishes this painting from Dou's other genre scenes. It suggests that he may have intended the painting as a genre-portrait of a lady playing the clavichord, a practice that was not uncommon among his contemporaries.^[9]

Dou had likely completed all three of these paintings by September 1665, when two of them appeared in an exhibition of the artist's works held in Leiden, organized by

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerrit Dou, *A Woman Playing a Clavichord*, ca. 1665, oil on panel, 37.7 x 29.9 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, inv. no. DPG056.



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *Young Woman Playing a Clavichord*, ca. 1665, oil on panel, 39 x 32 cm, Private Collection, USA.



Fig 3. Cornelis-Henricus van Meurs, after Gerrit Dou, *Young Woman Playing the Clavichord*, etching and engraving on paper, 317 x 268 mm,



the collector Johan de Bye (ca. 1625–70/72). It was one of the first exhibitions ever devoted to a single artist.^[10] Among the twenty-seven paintings by Dou in this exhibition were “a woman playing a ‘*claversimbel*’ with a tapestry, in daylight,” displayed in a case (*kas*), and “a girl playing a ‘*claversingel*.’”^[11] Although scholars have traditionally associated these paintings with *A Woman Playing a Clavichord* (fig 1) and *Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* (fig 2), respectively, the simple descriptions do not preclude the possibility that the Leiden Collection painting may have been one of the works in De Bye’s exhibition.^[12]

The intimate character of Dou’s scene is closely tied to the nature of the clavichord itself. An early type of portable keyboard that required dexterity of hand, the clavichord was typically performed solo and produced a low, soft sound that made it ideal for playing in domestic spaces.^[13] It was almost exclusively the domain of women, whose mastery of the instrument was seen as a symbol of virtue and refinement.^[14] On a visit to Rotterdam in 1707, the English traveler Joseph Taylor remarked with wonder upon the experience of hearing a woman play the harpsichord (a larger keyboard instrument) in the innermost space of a house. Once he returned home, he became “melancholy at the thoughts of being so soon deprived of it.”^[15] A similar sentiment is found in the inscription on an eighteenth-century reproductive print by Cornelis-Henricus van Meurs (b. 1680) after *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* (fig 3): “To chase away sorrow and melancholy . . . I play the clavichord; it is how I pass a tranquil life, without fear and without worry about fate or destiny.”^[16]

Van Meurs’s print is significant not only for thematic reasons, but also for the insight it provides into the painting’s provenance.^[17] Van Meurs likely saw *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* in Brussels in 1739 at the sale of the collection of Joseph Sansot, who served as steward for Louis Gand de Mérode de Montmorency (1678–1767), Prince of Isenghien.^[18] The buyer from the Brussels sale is not named, but it was probably Isenghien—in 1754 Jean-Baptiste Descamps records having seen a painting by Dou of “a young woman playing a clavichord” at Isenghien’s home.^[19]

By 1763, Dou’s painting can be traced with certainty to Sanssouci, Frederick the Great’s newly built summer palace in Potsdam. His Picture Gallery rivaled the greatest collections in Europe and showcased Frederick’s interest in the Leiden *fijnschilders* (fine painters), alongside the work of Italian, French, and Flemish artists.^[20] Dou’s painting soon thereafter hung in the Neues Palais, or New Palace, also in Potsdam, where it was exhibited in a small cabinet near the king’s day bedroom with works by Guido Reni (1575–1642), Godefridus Schalcken (1643–1706), and Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665).^[21] In 1773, Matthias Oesterreich, who authored the first catalogue of works in the Picture Gallery, described Dou’s

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no.
RP-P-1908-292.



Fig 4. X-ray of Gerrit Dou, *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord*, ca. 1665, 33.5 x 25.3 cm, oil on panel with arched top, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. GD-117.



Fig 5. After Gerrit Dou, *Girl Playing a Virginal*, 1665–99, 33 x 27.5 cm, oil on panel, Essex County Council, Chelmsford Shire Hall, England, inv. no. 10.



Fig 6. Gerrit Dou, *A Young Woman*

panel as “very treasurable for connoisseurs.”^[22]

The painting maintained its esteemed status in the royal collections of the Hohenzollern family thereafter, and eventually formed part of the group of works that the last German Emperor and King of Prussia, Wilhelm II (1859–1941), took with him into exile to the Netherlands in 1918, following the end of World War I and the dissolution of the German empire. Dou’s clavichord player hung in the smoking room of Huis Doorn, the emperor’s residence in Doorn, from 1920 until his death in 1941.^[23] It subsequently stayed within the private collection of the Hohenzollern family and was displayed at the palaces of Cecilienhof, Oels, and Burg Hohenzollern until its acquisition by The Leiden Collection in 2020.^[24]

The Leiden Collection’s *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* raises fascinating questions about Dou’s painting process. Technical examinations have revealed that the artist made substantial revisions to his initial concept for the composition.^[25] X-radiography indicates that Dou initially painted the woman within an arched stone window frame, a pictorial device he often used to give prominence to the central figure (fig 4).^[26] He also initially included, and then removed, a glass vase on the table beside the clavichord, and he at first placed the woman’s pearl necklace higher and further to the right.^[27] He made corresponding adjustments to the shape of the woman’s jacket, particularly the structure and folds of her left sleeve. These compositional changes demonstrate how Dou worked through his preliminary design over an extended period of time.^[28] Similar changes, for example, appear in *Old Woman at a Window with a Candle* and *Portrait of a Lady, Seated with a Music Book on Her Lap*, both in The Leiden Collection.^[29]

Also central to questions of Dou’s artistic process are the striking differences in the manner with which he rendered the woman’s face and costume. Dou painted the face with great subtlety, paying careful attention to the fall of light and shadow over her skin. He modeled her flesh tones in thin, translucent layers over a cool, gray imprimatura, and he applied creamy highlights around her eyes and along the bridge and tip of her nose.^[30] Her flushed cheeks imbue her with a warmth and liveliness. Dou depicted the wisps of hair around her face with loose, individual brushstrokes, which he then smoothly blended along her hairline.

Dou would have executed the woman’s face first, before turning to the rest of the composition. The slight difference in scale between her head and body supports this scenario, which is characteristic of the sequence that Dou and other Dutch artists customarily followed. Nevertheless, the modeling in the woman’s jacket, which is composed of undefined layers of green, yellow, and ochre, does not appear as refined as that of the face. This difference may be related, in part, to changes that have occurred to the paint used to model the jacket.^[31] Several of the pigments Dou used

Playing a Clavichord, displayed in its eighteenth-century French Régence frame, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. GD-117.

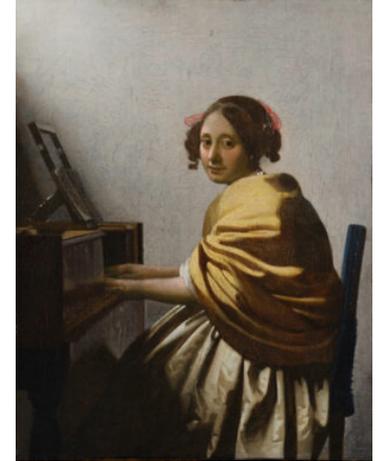


Fig 7. Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, ca. 1670–72, oil on canvas, 25.5 x 20.1 cm, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. JVe-100.



are known to degrade and discolor over time, including (yellow) orpiment and (blue) vivianite, the latter of which can turn from a rich blue to a muted yellow.^[32] It is likely that the jacket was originally a more vibrant greenish-blue color, not its current muted greenish-yellow.^[33]

Other elements in the woman's costume are also likely related to changes in the character of the paint, which has degraded and become more transparent over time.^[34] For instance, the woman's underlying white chemise and the area around her neckline are thinly painted, and they now appear unfinished or unresolved. The fur trim, which has been applied with small clusters of regular, parallel brushstrokes, appears to lack the nuance and liveliness typically associated with Dou's rendering of fur.^[35] Whether this difference in the character of the brushstrokes may also indicate the involvement of a pupil is, for the moment, an unsolvable question.^[36]

A final issue concerning the condition of the painting is whether the panel was originally a rectangular shape and has been altered into one with rounded upper corners.^[37] Van Meurs's reproductive etching depicts *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* as having a rectangular shape.^[38] Perhaps significantly, a near-contemporary painted copy after Dou's composition also shows the scene as a rectangular painting (**fig 5**).^[39] The narrower space behind the musician's chair in the Leiden Collection painting also suggests that the original panel may have been slightly trimmed along the right edge.^[40] If such changes to the panel were made, they would likely have occurred in the eighteenth century, not long after Van Meurs saw Dou's painting in Brussels, and they may have been intended to focus the composition more tightly around the sitter and enhance the intimacy of the scene.^[41]

It is probable that *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* received its richly ornamented French Régence frame, with its rounded inner corners at the top, in the early eighteenth century (**fig 6**).^[42] The finely carved and gilded frame reflects Frederick the Great's taste for the galleries at Sanssouci.^[43] Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century inventories from the palace describe Dou's painting as one of twenty-five hanging in "gilt frames" with rounded corners at the top.^[44] The painting's splendid frame, which has been recently restored, is a fitting home for Dou's rediscovered clavichord player.^[45]

Alongside its fascinating history, *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* owes its distinctive place within Dou's oeuvre to the painting's clarity of subject and portrait-like depiction of its sitter. The sensitive treatment of the musician, poised before the keyboard and gazing directly at the viewer, would have appealed to the sensibilities of a sophisticated patron. Dou's approach to this subject matter also provided inspiration for works by fellow artists such as Johannes Vermeer, including, most notably, his *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* in The Leiden Collection (**fig 7**). At the same



time, the puzzling aspects of Dou's painting leave unanswered questions about the artist's working methods, his studio practices in Leiden, and the involvement of his pupils more broadly. Whatever the circumstances of its early history and production, the painting will continue to enchant us in myriad ways.

- Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 2022

Endnotes

1. Frederick the Great acquired *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* by 1763. See Provenance and discussion that follows below.
2. The painting was published in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century catalogues of Dutch paintings by John Smith and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, including the first monograph on Dou, by Wilhelm Martin, in 1901 (Wilhelm Martin, “Leven en werken van Gerrit Dou beschouwd in verband met het schildersleven van zijn tijd” [PhD diss., Leiden University, 1901], 218, no. 236), but this work has otherwise remained largely out of public view and little known to scholars. Ronni Baer included it among the list of “works of rejected attribution” in her dissertation on Dou in 1990 (“The Paintings of Gerrit Dou [1613–1675]” [PhD diss., New York University, 1990], 2: no. C67). Michiel Jonker and Ellinoor Bergvelt’s recent *Dulwich Picture Gallery: Catalogue of the Dutch, Flemish and German Schools, with Addenda to the British Schools*, vol. 1, A–N, RKD Studies (The Hague, 2021), no. DPG56, under related works, no. 3, raises the possibility that the Leiden Collection painting may be the work of a pupil, but the authors provide no further explanation. See References and Exhibition History.
3. Dou’s interest in high-life genre scenes in the 1660s coincided with the work of other Dutch genre painters, such as Gabriel Metsu (1629–67), Frans van Mieris (1635–81), and Johannes Vermeer (1632–75). Gerard ter Borch (1582/1583–1662) probably served as the inspiration for Dou’s interest in this elevated subject matter. See Ronni Baer, “The Life and Art of Gerrit Dou,” 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 39–42; and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Erudition and Artistry: The Enduring Appeal of Dutch Genre Painting,” in *Vermeer and the Masters of Dutch Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer, Blaise Ducos, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Paris, Louvre Museum; Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2017), 29–31.
4. Dou introduced the tapestry motif in his genre scenes around 1660, typically placing them in the foreground of the composition, as he did in his two other scenes of women at the clavichord (see figs 1 and 2). In this work, he reversed the motif by placing the tapestry behind the woman. Ronni Baer discusses Dou’s use of the tapestry motif in “The Life and Art of Gerrit Dou,” 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 40–42.
5. A comparable red string attaching the clavichord’s cover survives on an extant example, Anonymous, Italy, clavichord with depiction of a naval battle (the Battle of Lepanto?), late 16th century, length 113.1 cm, Collection Musée de la musique, Paris; illustrated in Marjorie E. Wieseman, “Inviting Duets,” in *Vermeer and the Masters of Dutch Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer,

Blaise Ducos, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Paris, Louvre Museum; Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2017), 139, fig. 69.

6. Jan Miense Molenaer's (1610–68) *Woman Playing the Virginal* from ca. 1637 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) preceded Dou's depiction of this subject matter by several decades, though interest in the subject—and, notably, the depiction of a lone woman at the clavichord—emerged only in the 1660s.
7. Music had long been associated with metaphors for love and harmony. For the Dulwich painting, see Ronni Baer, "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)" (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), 2: no. 111; Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle, 2000), no. 30; and Michiel Jonker and Ellinoor Bergvelt, *Dulwich Picture Gallery: Catalogue of the Dutch, Flemish and German Schools, with Addenda to the British Schools*, vol. 1, A–N, RKD Studies (The Hague, 2021), no. DPG56.
8. Dou introduced the depiction of secondary scenes in his genre paintings in the 1650s and typically used them to give meaning to the figures in the foreground. See Ronni Baer, "The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)" (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), "Works of Uncertain Attribution," 2: no. B6 (Baer revised her opinion and accepted the work in 2012, as cited in the object record at the RKD–Netherlands Institute for Art History: <http://rkd.nl/explore/images/249487>). This painting, now in a private collection in the United States, was formerly with Johnny Van Haeften, London.
9. There are no other known instances of Dou executing a genre-portrait, but artists such as Jan Steen (1626–79), Frans van Mieris, and Gabriel Metsu often incorporated self-portraits in or used their wives or commissioned sitters as models for their genre scenes. Metsu, for example, likely painted *Elegant Lady Writing at Her Desk* in The Leiden Collection as this type of genre-portrait. Dou had largely abandoned painting portraits by this later point in his career, though a notable exception is *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1655 (National Gallery, London). I would like to thank Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. for first raising this question during our discussions about the painting.
10. The exhibition was held in the *voorcamer* (front room) of the home of Johannes Hannot. An advertisement for the exhibition appeared in the *Haarlemsche Courant* on 26 September 1665. See Wilhelm Martin, *Het Leven en de Werken van Gerrit Dou* (Leiden, 1901), 72.
11. No. 2, "*Een claversimbelspeelster met een tapijt, daghlicht*"; and no. 23 (paintings without cases), "*Eerst [sonder kas] een mit een lijst, sijnde een meysge op een claversingel spelende.*" Notably, two of Dou's paintings in The Leiden Collection, *Goat in a Landscape* and *Young Woman in a Niche with a Parrot and Cage*, were also likely exhibited in Johannes Hannot's house on the Breestraat. For the 1665 document, see Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Sheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht* (Leiden, 1986–92), 3b: 486, nos. 2 and 23. The terms *claversimbel* and *claversingel* were used interchangeably in the seventeenth century to describe the clavichord as well as other keyboard instruments, such as the virginal or harpsichord. However, the latter two were larger than the clavichord, and their strings run perpendicular to the keys, while a clavichord's run parallel. Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure* (Exh. cat. London,

National Gallery of Art, 2013) (London, 2013), 74–75.

12. Because *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* has been for so long overlooked by scholars, it has never been considered as a candidate for one of the paintings by Dou in De Bye's exhibition. None of Dou's paintings of clavichord players can be traced with certainty after 1665, making it impossible to distinguish among them. The provenance of the paintings becomes clearer—and less intertwined—after the mid-eighteenth century. Some of these issues are discussed in Michiel Jonker and Ellinoor Bergvelt, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings: Dulwich Picture Gallery* (London, 2016), 70–71.
13. Lucas van Dijck and Ton Koopman, *The Harpsichord in Dutch Art before 1800* (Zutphen, 1987), n.p.; Edward Buijsen and Louis Peter Grijp, *Music and Painting in the Golden Age* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder; Antwerp, Hessenhuis Museum) (Zwolle, 1994), 368; and Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery of Art, 2013) (London, 2013), 74.
14. Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery of Art, 2013) (London, 2013), 14–15.
15. Joseph Taylor, who visited Rotterdam in September 1707, recalled, “When I went to wait on her, I was carried up on a noble marble staircase through a long dining-room paved with excellent marble and hung with Indian satin and adorned with curious china. And then through another room into the withdrawing room, where the lady was playing upon a harpsichord. It is impossible to tell you how I was delighted with her genteel reception, which was mixed with such an air of modesty and freedom that she appeared inexpressibly charming. After I heard her sing several Latin, Italian, French, and English songs, and enjoyed the pleasure of a most engaging conversation, I retired home, melancholy at the thoughts of being so soon deprived of it.” Cornelis Daniël van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travelers, 1660–1720* (Amsterdam, 1998), as cited in Marjorie E. Wieseman, “Inviting Duets,” in *Vermeer and the Masters of Dutch Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer, Blaise Ducos, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Paris, Louvre Museum; Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2017), 135.
16. “*Pour Chasser Le Chagrin Et La Melancolie, De Cet Aimable Lieu: Je joue De Clavessin: C'est Ainsi Que Je Passe Tranquillement La Vie Sans Crainte Et Sans Souci Du Sort Ni Du Destin.*”
17. The etching after *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* forms part of a series of (at least) twenty-two reproductive prints by Cornelis-Henricus van Meurs after paintings by Leiden *fijschilders*, including Dou, Frans van Mieris, and Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84). None of these etchings are dated, but many of them depict paintings that were sold in Brussels between 1738 and 1740. Gerdien Wuestman has suggested that Van Meurs probably saw these paintings some years earlier, perhaps already in the 1720s. Nevertheless, the etchings must have been executed before 1743, the year in which the Brussels publisher Michael Franciscus Vermeren included impressions from Van Meurs's copperplates in his moralizing book *Den theater des bedroghs, ofte De listige onstantvastigheyt des werelts: Voerende voor iaer-schryvende sinnebeelden; voor desen noyt gedruckt in onse Neder-lantsche taele; verciert met vele schooner kopere plaeten* (Brussels, 1743). *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* appears on page 29. See

Gerdien Wuestman, “C.H. van Meurs and His *fijnschilder* Prints: A Mysterious Printmaker with a Forgotten Oeuvre,” *Simiolus* 37, no. 2 (2013–14): 118–40.

18. *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* can probably be identified with *Un tableau de Girardau, representant une jeune fille, qui joue de l'Épinette*, no. 46 in the sale of Joseph Sansot's collection in Brussels on 20 July 1739. The painting sold for 11,15 guilders to an unknown buyer. Van Meurs also made etchings after five other paintings that were sold in Brussels in 1739 and 1740. See Gerdien Wuestman, “C.H. van Meurs and His *fijnschilder* Prints: A Mysterious Printmaker with a Forgotten Oeuvre,” *Simiolus* 37, no. 2 (2013–14): 125n29.
19. “*Chez M. le Maréchal d'Issenghien, une jeune Femme qui touche du Clavecin.*” Jean Baptiste Decamps, *La vie des peintres flamands, allemands, et hollandaise: Avec des portrait graves en taille-douce, une indication de leurs principaux ouvrages et des réflexions sur leurs différentes manières* (Paris, 1754), 2: 225. The possibility that the painting in the Prince of Isenghien's collection can be identified with *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* has not been considered by scholars. See also note 12.
20. It is not known where Frederick the Great acquired Dou's painting. He had a vast network of dealers who purchased paintings for him across Europe in this period, and unfortunately no documentation survives for his acquisition of this work. I am grateful to Alexandra Nina Bauer at the Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg for her kind assistance with further research regarding the provenance. The acquisition of Dou's painting by Frederick the Great and its subsequent provenance in the Hohenzollern family was provided by the previous owner and shared by Christie's. I would like to thank Caroline Van Cauwenberge for her assistance in compiling the painting's provenance, as well as her contributions to its broader research.

Frederick the Great often exchanged paintings between the displays of the Picture Gallery and the Neues Palais, so it is likely that Dou's painting may first have hung in the former and later was moved to the galleries in the Neues Palais, where it was recorded in 1773. See Matthias Oesterreich, *Inspektors der großen Könighchen Bilder-Gallerie zu Sans-Souci, Beschreibung alle Gemählde, Antiquitäten, und anderer kostbarer und merkwürdiger Sachen, so in denen beyden Schlößern von Sans-Souci, wie auch in dem Schloße zu Potsdam und Charlottenburg enthalten sind* (Berlin, 1773), 26, no. 73; and Gerd Bartoschek, *Die Gemälde im Neuen Palais* (Potsdam, 1976), 41. An excellent discussion of Frederick the Great's collecting is in Alexandra Nina Bauer and Franziska Windt, “Die Suche dem Schönen: Das friderizianische Konzept der Gemäldehängung in der Bildergalerie von Sanssouci zwischen königlicher Repräsentation und Selbstdarstellung,” in *Die Bildergalerie Fridrichs des Grossen. Geschichte—Kontext—Bedeutung*, ed. Franziska Windt (Berlin, 2015), 197–240; for the Netherlandish paintings especially, 197–217.

21. The Neues Palais accommodated Frederick's growing collection and continued the principles that had guided the Picture Gallery. The painting hung in cabinet no. 5, together with a *Cleopatra* by Guido Reni, *A Boy Fishing* by Godefridus Schalcken, and a *Rinaldo and Armida* by Nicholas Poussin. This cabinet was located in one of the many picture galleries in the emperor's apartments in the Neues Palais. Matthias Oesterreich, *Inspektors der großen Könighchen Bilder-Gallerie zu Sans-Souci, Beschreibung alle*



Gemählde, Antiquitäten, und anderer kostbarer und merkwürdiger Sachen, so in denen beyden Schlößern von Sans-Souci, wie auch in dem Schloße zu Potsdam und Charlottenburg enthalten sind (Berlin, 1773), 26–27.

22. Matthias Oesterreich, *Inspektors der großen Könighen Bilder-Gallerie zu Sans-Souci, Beschreibung alle Gemählde, Antiquitäten, und anderer kostbarer und merkwürdiger Sachen, so in denen beyden Schlößern von Sans-Souci, wie auch in dem Schloße zu Potsdam und Charlottenburg enthalten sind* (Berlin, 1773), 26, no. 73.
23. This information was provided by the previous owners of the painting. Following the end of World War I, Wilhelm II was forced into exile with the disintegration of the German Empire. Part of the collection went with him to Huis Doorn, the Netherlands; in the inventory of this collection from 1927, *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord* is listed as hanging in the smoking room with the Emperor's collection of French paintings (inv. no. 14 and cat. no. 5122). The painting remained with the private family collection following an agreement between the state of Prussia and Hohenzollern family in 1926.
24. After the emperor's death in 1941, the painting was taken to the palace of Cecilienhof in Potsdam, then to Oels, and in 1944, to Burg Hohenzollern. It has since remained out of public view and has been inaccessible to scholars. Its last whereabouts mentioned in the literature is with Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, who died in 1994. It subsequently passed by descent to his children until its acquisition by the present collector.
25. In March 2021, the painting underwent technical study at Winterthur's Scientific Research and Analytical Laboratory. X-radiography, infrared reflectography, X-ray fluorescence (XRF), and macro-photography (Hirox microscopy) were performed.
26. After removing the stone archway, Dou repositioned the woman further to the left and adjusted the position of her right arm, as well as the folds of the jacket. These changes help to explain the transparent quality of the woman's white apron. Dou must have shifted the table further to the left during the painting process, which, over time, has led to the original red carpet being exposed beneath it.

The thin application of the paint layers may have led to these earlier iterations becoming visible over time. Traces of Dou's compositional changes are evident in other works from this period, including *Lady at Her Toilet*, 1667 (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam), where he changed the position of the woman's chair and the birdcage and also first included, and then removed, a garment hanging over the chair in the foreground. Annetje Boersma, "Dou's Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings," 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 57.

27. An earlier restorer may have erroneously tried to strengthen the outlines of the vase at some point, which may account for its ghostly outlines still visible today. The vase is not present in Van Meurs's etching, which indicates that he saw the present composition. Dou made a similar adjustment to the pearl necklace worn by the sitter in *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1655 (National Gallery, London).



28. Dou's working method has been discussed by a number of scholars, among them: Luuk Struick van der Loeff and Karin Groen, "The Restoration and Technical Examination of Gerard Dou's Young Mother in the Mauritshuis," in *ICOM Committee for Conservation: 10th Triennial Meeting, Washington, DC*, ed. Janet Bridgeland (Lawrence, Kansas, 1993), 98–103; Annetje Boersma, "Dou's Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings," 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 57–58; and Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in The Leiden Collection," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3.
29. In *Old Woman at a Window with a Candle*, the woman originally held an oil lamp, and the birdcage was positioned lower in the frame in order to be the focus of her attention. Although Dou replaced this with the candle, the lighting on the woman's face reflects the lamp's original position. In the latter painting, Dou first positioned the sitter within a stone archway, its subsequent removal prompting him to shift the woman slightly to the left in order to accommodate the revised composition. There are many other examples; see Annetje Boersma, "Dou's Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings," 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 57–58; and Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in The Leiden Collection," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3.
30. The handling of the face is characteristic of Dou; see the technical report on file in The Leiden Collection archives, and Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in The Leiden Collection," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 18–19, DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3.
31. Notably, early sources describe the woman in the Leiden Collection painting as wearing a jacket with a "grayish hue." See John Smith, *Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters* (London, 1842), no. 50; and Wilhelm Martin, *Het Leven en de Werken van Gerrit Dou* (Leiden, 1901), no. 236.
32. XRF analysis identified the presence of orpiment and vivianite, as well as trace amounts of azurite, zinc, and yellow lake in the upper layers of the jacket. Dou also likely used bituminous pigments, such as Cassel earth, which may have contributed to the crack formation in darker passages in the background. Bitumen, as well as indigo and lapis, cannot be detected through the use of XRF. The technical report is kept on file in the Leiden Collection archives. I would like to thank Kristen deGhetaldi, as well as graduate students Magdalena Solano and Katie Rovito, who contributed to the report on the results of the XRF analysis.
33. High-resolution imaging performed with the Hirox microscope on areas of the woman's jacket indicates the artist applied a yellowish glaze containing orpiment over much of the coat. This layering is consistent



with previous findings for The Leiden Collection's *Scholar Interrupted at His Writing*. Cross-sectional pigment analysis on areas of this latter painting showed that Dou applied a yellow glaze over several layers of different blue pigments, including vivianite, indigo, and azurite, which have been shown to discolor or fade over time. This layering of pigments is characteristic of Dou's technique over the course of his career and has resulted in other cases of this kind of color change. A similar discoloration of blue paint into a pale gray occurs in Dou's *The Young Mother*, 1658 (Mauritshuis, The Hague). See Annetje Boersma, "Dou's Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings," 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 54–63; and Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in The Leiden Collection," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3.

34. For compositional changes Dou made to the jacket, see discussion above and note 26.
35. A comparable example of Dou's handling of fur trim may be seen in *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1655 (National Gallery, London). However, the differences in the brushwork are evident in the more integrated strokes of fur, which overlap more naturalistically with one another in the National Gallery painting. I would like to thank Kristen deGhetaldi, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., and Melanie Gifford for sharing their thoughts on the handling of Dou's fur. See also J. Wadum, "'Dou Doesn't Paint, Oh No, He Juggles with His Brush': Gerrit Dou—A Rembrandtesque Fijnschilder," *Art Matters* 1 (2002): 62–77.
36. There is no evidence that Dou collaborated with pupils in his studio, nor that he routinely left works unfinished, thus making it difficult to reach a clearer hypothesis at this stage of research. Nevertheless, during the 1660s, Dou had several pupils, including Pieter van Slingelandt (1640–91), Godefridus Schalcken, and (possibly) his nephew Domenicus van Tol (ca. 1635–76).
37. The panel is beveled on all sides, but the thinnest areas are located directly above the rounded top corners, possibly where it would have been cut down. The overall average thickness of the beveled edge is about .32 cm. The wood has a vertical grain. The first mention of the painting having rounded upper corners is in John Smith, *Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters* (London, 1842), no. 50.
38. Van Meurs is known to have rendered arched compositions by other *fijnschilders* in rectangular formats, but it is not clear whether he made these changes himself or worked from painted copies that had already been modified. It is possible that Van Meurs made his print after the painted copy of Dou's work, but, for the various reasons discussed above, it seems more probable that Van Meurs saw Dou's original painting. See Gerdien Wuestman, "C.H. van Meurs and His *Fijnschilder* Prints: A Mysterious Printmaker with a Forgotten Oeuvre," *Simiolus* 37, no. 2 (2013–14): 118.
39. It is worth noting that the top section in the painted copy is larger than that in Van Meurs's print. The copy, which has been dated to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, was previously attributed to Domenicus van Tol; see the object record for the copy at the RKD—Netherlands Institute for Art History, <http://rkd.nl/explore/images/287805>. Ronni Baer has noted that, while Dou did not make copies



after his own paintings, the fact that contemporary copies exist suggests he may have employed his students to duplicate his more popular compositions. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675),” (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), 1: 82–83.

40. For another instance of a panel reduction in The Leiden Collection, see the entry on Rembrandt’s (1606–69) *Bust of a Young Bearded Man*.
41. Perplexingly, in 1938, the published dimensions of the painting changed from 38 x 30.5 cm to 32 x 24.5 cm, which correspond more closely to the painting’s current measurements (33.5 x 25.3 cm). No published dimensions appear after this date. See *Tentoonstelling van oude kunst uit particulier bezit in stad en provincie* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Utrecht, 1938), no. 116. Since the painting already had rounded corners by at least 1842 (see note 37), the change in measurements cannot be related to the adjustments made to the panel’s shape. It is possible, then, that the measurements that appear in the earlier sources are incorrect, or they include an additional framing element.
42. Régence period frames refer to a period of style and production in France under Louis XV from 1715 to 1723. Deborah Davis, *The Secret Lives of Frames: One Hundred Years of Art and Artistry* (New York, 2007).
43. Frederick the Great employed the artist Johann Melchoir Kambly (1718–83), among others, to design and execute frames for his growing collection for the main Picture Gallery of Sanssouci. A uniform model did not exist, however, and not all frames were designed specifically for these purposes; some paintings hung in the frames from which they were purchased, predominantly carved and gilded eighteenth-century frames, which was likely the case for *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord*. I would like to thank Carsten Dilba and Katja Wendler from the Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten for their generous help in identifying the style and period of the frame for Dou’s painting. They also identified an identical frame in the Rheinsberg Palace collection that belongs to the work of an unknown seventeenth-century painter. The scene depicts an elegant woman with her servant. Correspondence from January 2021 on file at The Leiden Collection. See also Carsten Dilba and Franziska Windt, “Die Gemälde Rahmen der Bildergalerie von Sanssouci,” in *Die Bildergalerie Friedrichs des Grossen. Geschichte—Kontext—Bedeutung*, ed. Franziska Windt (Berlin, 2015), 257–80.
44. I would like to thank Alexandra Nina Bauer for sharing this information about the frame from the inventories of the Neues Palais.
45. Bret Headley of Headley Conservation Services, LLC, Philadelphia restored the frame in 2021.

Provenance

- Possibly Johan de Bye, Leiden, by 1665.^[1]
- Possibly Joseph Sansot, Lille (his sale, Brussels, 20 July 1739, no. 46, for 11.15 guilders).
- Possibly Louis de Gand de Mérode de Montmorency (1678–1767), Prince of Isenghien, by 1754.



- Frederick the Great (1712–86), Picture Gallery and Neues Palais, Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam, by 1763; and by descent (private sale, Christie's, New York, 2020).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2020.

Provenance Notes

1. Gerrit Dou's *Young Woman in a Niche with a Parrot and Cage* and Gerrit Dou's *Goat in a Landscape*, both now in The Leiden Collection, were also formerly in the collection of Johan de Bye.

Exhibition History

- Possibly Leiden, front room in the house of Johannes Hannot on the Breestraat, September 1665 [lent by Johan de Bye].
- Utrecht, Centraal Museum Utrecht, "Tentoonstelling van oude kunst uit particulier bezit in stad en provincie," 2 July–15 September 1938, no. 116 [lent by Emperor Wilhelm II].
- 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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Versions

Painted Versions

1. After Gerrit Dou, *Girl Playing a Virginal*, 1665–99, 33 x 27.5 cm, oil on panel, Essex County Council, Chelmsford Shire Hall, England, inv. no. 10.

2. After Gerrit Dou, *A Young Lady Playing at a Harpsichord*, oil on panel, 33.3 x 26.8 cm, previous sale, Phillips, London, 2 July 1991, no. 299.
3. Gerrit Dou, *A Young Woman Playing a Virginal*, oil on panel, 35 x 28.5 cm, previously Hochschild Collection.

Print

1. Cornelis-Henricus van Meurs (b. 1680), after Gerrit Dou, *A Young Woman Playing the Clavichord*, etching and engraving on paper, 317 x 269 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1908-292.^[1]

Versions Notes

1. Cornelis-Henricus van Meurs also etched the following paintings in The Leiden Collection: Frans van Mieris, *Woman Reading and a Man Seated at a Table*, probably 1676; Caspar Netscher, *Lucretia*, ca. 1665–67; and Frans van Mieris, *Death of Lucretia*, 1679.

Technical Summary

The wooden support is a singular piece of oak that is arched along the top with the grain oriented vertically.^[1] Examining the reverse of the picture reveals that all four edges are beveled. The bevel along the curved edge is burnished and patinaed, indicating that the panel has retained this particular format for some time; however, it is possible that the panel was cut down at some point.

Based on the characterization of cross sections collected from other pictures by Dou and his circle, the ground is likely composed primarily of chalk bound in glue.^[2] Infrared (IR) photography reveals traces of fluid brown-black strokes beneath the white chemise and fur trim along the bodice, as well as additional strokes beneath the sitter's right arm; these strokes may correspond to a section of the underdrawing that was never fully covered with paint but was instead allowed to remain during the final stages of the composition.

Both the IR photograph and the X-radiograph demonstrate that the panel has undergone a rather complex progression in terms of compositional development. Throughout the lower paint layers, several fine diagonal scratches extend from just above the sitter's head through the face and torso and continue all the way to the bottom edge of the picture. As these markings appear white, or more radio-opaque, in the X-radiograph, it is possible that an earlier composition was scraped down and the resulting scratches and grooves covered with a thin application of an imprimatura.

Other notable changes include a repositioning of the pearl necklace, the folds of the sitter's dress, and the red cloth. Perhaps the most dramatic alteration to the composition was the overpainting of an arched niche or window that originally framed the sitter, along with additional objects (what may be a bird, a lantern, and

glassware). Finally, there are two puzzling, small, circular marks in the X-radiograph located near the radio-opaque “halo” of paint surrounding the sitter’s head; these artifacts, combined with the presence of the diagonal markings, further support the notion that this picture was heavily reworked over an extended period of time.

Macrophotographs obtained from thinly painted areas, such as the sitter’s face, indicate that the underpainting / initial toning layer likely contains a mixture of lead white, chalk, earth pigments, and/or carbon black. These pigments were admixed in order to create a slightly cooler tone characteristic of the latter part of Dou’s career, which supports the proposed date of the picture.^[3]

The palette and paint handling observed throughout the picture are consistent with those encountered in other works by Dou. The depiction of the white fur trim is realized with hatched strokes of thick paint, while a more pointillistic technique has been used on the red carpet at bottom left.^[4] The hair has been painted with carefully delineated strokes of paint that echo the color of the mid-tones used in the flesh. The strings of the clavichord have also been executed with extreme care, using lightly pigmented strokes containing carbon black, a technique similar to that used in other works to emulate fine text and imagery on the opened pages of books and manuscripts. Nondestructive pigment analysis identified lead white, vermilion, earth colors, lead-tin yellow, chalk, vivianite, azurite, and orpiment. Degradation of vivianite as well as orpiment may account for the confused appearance of portions of the sitter’s blue-green coat.

Overall, the wooden support, ground, and paint layers appear stable and are in good condition. Some areas of the composition, most noticeably in the background of the upper-right quadrant, exhibit pronounced craquelure that is readily visible when the picture is viewed in partial raking light. In addition, slight ridges in the paint can also be seen in raking light beneath the sitter’s left arm and in an area directly above her right arm, suggesting extensive repainting or reworking in these areas. Examination under ultraviolet light reveals only minor, scattered losses; however, there is also evidence that portions of the painting were left partially or minimally cleaned. It is possible that this is a result of previous restoration campaigns combined with Dou’s occasional tendency to overpaint elements of his own work. While some of the varnish layer(s) may not be intact, the overall sheen of the surface is fairly even.

– Kristin deGhetaldi, 2022

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Dendrochronological dating has yet to be carried out on the panel support. Analysis performed on Dou’s paintings that were created later in his career reveal that he typically used Baltic oak from trees yielding felling dates that are considerably earlier than the creation of the paintings. See Annetje Boersma, “Dou’s Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings,” 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 58.
2. At the time of this report, cross-sectional analysis has yet to be performed on *A Young Woman Playing a*



Clavichord.

3. The nature of Dou's underpainting (also referred to as "dead-coloring") changed over the course of his career. Earlier pictures have been found to possess a warmer, brown tone, while later pictures tend to have a cooler, grayer appearance. See: Annetje Boersma, "Dou's Painting Technique: An Examination of Two Paintings," 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) (Zwolle, 2000), 54–63; Jørgen Wadum, "Dou doesn't paint, oh no, he juggles with his brush. Gerrit Dou a Rembrandtesque 'Fijnschilder,'" in *Art Matters*, ed. Erma Hermens (Zwolle, 2002), 62–77; Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley, "Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in the Leiden Collection," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 1–49. DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3; Luuk Struik van der Loeff and Karen Groen, "The Restoration and Technical Examination of Gerard Dou's 'The Young Mother' in the Mauritshuis,'" In *10th Triennial Meeting, Washington, DC, USA, 22-27 August 1993: Preprints*, ed. Janet Bridgeland (Paris, 1933), 1: 98–103.
4. A number of carpets depicted in Dou's oeuvre demonstrate the use of pointillistic highlights to represent the weave pile, including *The Violin Player*, 1653 (Princely Collections, Liechtenstein); *The Doctor*, ca. 1660–65 (National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen); *Self-Portrait at Age Fifty*, 1663 (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Arts, Kansas City); *A Woman Playing a Clavichord*, ca. 1665 (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London); and *A Young Woman at Her Toilet*, 1667 (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam).