



Allegory of Painting

Jacob Toorenvliet
(Leiden 1640 – 1719 Leiden)

ca. 1675–79

oil on copper

24.6 x 31 cm

possible traces of signature, bottom left

JT-106

How to cite

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A recurrent theme in Jacob Toorenvliet's oeuvre is that of common people engaged in everyday activities, but on at least six occasions he painted abstract allegories, one of the finest of these being *Allegory of Painting*.^[1] Although seemingly situated within an ordinary Dutch interior complete with a table covered with a colorful carpet, bookshelf, hanging curtain, and an inquisitive dog, numerous pictorial elements in this work have symbolic associations that distinguish it from Toorenvliet's genre pictures. The objects near the woman in the light blue dress, including a palette with brushes, a mahlstick, and a painting on an easel in the background, indicate that she is an allegorical figure personifying the art of painting. As she points to the open book she holds with her left hand, she turns her head toward the old man in a mantle who is about to crown her with a laurel wreath. He wears a similar wreath and rests his hand on a celestial globe, as if trying to draw the viewer's attention to it.

The identity of the bearded old man is made clear through a comparison of this painting with Toorenvliet's *Allegory of Painting Inspired by Poetry*.^[2] In this latter work, a bearded man similarly adorns a female personification of painting with a wreath of laurel, but here he not only wears a laurel branch but also a label identifying him as *Poesia* (Poetry). The message is clear: poetry inspires the art of painting, a conceit that had its origins in Horace's dictum that poetry and painting should be considered as sister arts (*ut pictura poesis*).^[3] The relationship of painting to poetry was articulated as "Poetry in painting keeps silent, while painting in poetry speaks" in the text describing the allegorical concept of Painting in Cesare Ripa's popular *Iconologia*, an emblem book with which Toorenvliet was well acquainted.^[4] The celestial globe on which the old man rests his hand is also an appropriate attribute for an allegorical figure of Poetry. In his discussion of the concept, Ripa describes Poetry as wearing a laurel wreath, since the origin of verse is in Heaven.^[5] Furthermore, the book to which the woman points signifies that the art of painting should be based on literary tradition, thereby proclaiming the absolute superiority of the category of history painting.

Toorenvliet probably executed this skillfully finished painting in Vienna around 1675–79, where he lived and worked from the late 1660s until 1679. He produced most of his copper paintings during that period of his career.^[6] In Vienna, moreover, Toorenvliet further developed his ability to distinguish between a wide variety of materials and textures, evident here in the smooth surface of the plaster, the soft fluff of the carpet, the sharp highlight on the brown skull, and the slightly creased pages of the old sketchbook. At the same time, he became interested in rendering complex allegorical subjects. Here, for example, he purposely juxtaposed a skull with a plaster cast of a classical female head, thereby contrasting the symbol of the transience of human existence with the ideal of timeless beauty, a fundamental concern for the art

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Detail of plaster cast of *Bacchanal with Children and a Goat* in Jacob Toorenvliet, *Allegory of Painting* (JT-106)



Fig 2. Detail of sketchbook in Jacob Toorenvliet, *Allegory of Painting* (JT-106)

of painting. The small, brown sculpture of a male figure behind the plaster head is most likely an example of an *écorché*, a model of the body with its skin removed and outer muscles displayed. Such models were important for the study of human anatomy, which was of vital interest for artists working within the classical tradition.^[7]

The relief behind these objects is a partial plaster cast of *Bacchanal with Children and a Goat* (**fig 1**), one of the most famous works by the illustrious seventeenth-century classicizing Flemish sculptor, François Duquesnoy (1597–1643).^[8] Duquesnoy's contemporaries so esteemed his sculptural works that they described them as rivaling those of the ancient masters.^[9] Plaster casts of his sculptures were made for artists to study alongside casts of classical sculpture, as can be seen in a painting by Michiel Sweerts (1618–64), *Painter's Studio with a Model*.^[10] *Bacchanal with Children and a Goat* was well known to Dutch painters, and Gerrit Dou (1613–75), Toorenvliet's uncle-in-law, often incorporated an image of this relief sculpture into his paintings.^[11] One reason Dou chose to include this relief in his work was to display his ability to simulate different materials and objects, including stone sculpture, but another was undoubtedly the allegorical message about the power of illusionism that it conveyed. In this relief, the realistic appearance of the mask held by a putto at the left so fooled a goat that he had to be restrained by a host of putti from charging it.

It is thus fully understandable that Toorenvliet, who so emulated Dou, inserted this relief into his picture.^[12] Remarkably, however, Toorenvliet omitted the left portion of Duquesnoy's relief that included the image of the putto holding a mask to "deceive" a goat. One explanation for this omission is that Toorenvliet sought to extend Duquesnoy's allegory into the broader pictorial image. The goat now appears to rush toward the woman, who, having the ability to create compellingly illusionistic images, both literally and symbolically takes the putto's place.

The open sketchbook, which practically slides off the table, is the last piece of the pictorial puzzle in Toorenvliet's intriguing allegory. On the right page are several sketches of human eyes and ears (**fig 2**). Such sketches of individual body parts had their origin in Italian drawing books of the sixteenth century, and were important in studio practice as well as in art theory.^[13] This kind of drawing book could also be found in northern Europe, for example Abraham Bloemaert's (1566–1651) famous sketchbook, engraved and published by Frederik Bloemaert in installments beginning around 1650.^[14] Toorenvliet's depiction of the sketchbook shows his interest in the art of *disegno* as important for comprehending both human anatomy and ideal proportions of the human body.

Toorenvliet left Vienna and returned to the Netherlands around 1679, subsequently moving around 1686 from Amsterdam to his native Leiden, where he helped to



establish a drawing academy.^[15] Toorenvliet, an esteemed artist of international experience, founded this academy for “fine painters” with the younger artists Carel de Moor (1655–1738) and Willem van Mieris (1662–1747). Toorenvliet’s great emphasis on drawing as the practical and theoretical foundation of painting must have been stimulated by the growing taste for classicism during this period, partially inspired by Gerard de Lairesse’s guiding principles. De Lairesse’s *Groot schilderboek* (1707) recommended that painters use books and plaster casts of ancient sculpture to learn the general principles of classical beauty and the perfect proportions of the human body. *Allegory of Painting*, which Toorenvliet probably painted before he returned to his native country, can be considered a prelude to the role this important painter and draughtsman had in founding this new drawing academy.

- Junko Aono, 2017

Endnotes

1. Susanne Henriette Karau, “Leben und Werk des Leidener Malers Jacob Toorenvliet (1640–1719)” (PhD diss. Universität Berlin, 2002), 134, nos. A56 and 57 (as a pendant), 91, B12, 13, 14, 15.
2. Jacob Toorenvliet, *An Allegory of Painting Inspired by Poetry*, ca. 1680, oil on panel, 39 x 29 cm, present location unknown. Susanne Henriette Karau, “Leben und Werk des Leidener Malers Jacob Toorenvliet (1640–1719)” (PhD diss. Universität Berlin, 2002), 147–48, no. B14.
3. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, v. 361. *Ut pictura poesis* (poetry is like painting) is considered a key concept in Renaissance artistic theory, though the inverse form of “painting is like poetry,” is more often encountered in the humanistic tradition. For seventeenth-century Dutch painting, this concept offers the important theoretical foundation for the iconographic interpretation of didactic meaning of the visible world. See Eddy de Jongh, *Tot lering en vermaak: betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen in de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1976), 20–26.
4. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghe des Verstands* (Amsterdam, 1644; reprint, Soest, 1971), 452–53. Toorenvliet’s familiarity with Ripa’s *Iconologia* is confirmed by his *Allegory of Rhetoric*, in which a figure holds a copy of the volume. See Susanne Henriette Karau, “Leben und Werk des Leidener Malers Jacob Toorenvliet (1640–1719)” (PhD diss. Universität Berlin, 2002), B12.
5. Appropriately, Ripa’s Poetry wears a blue dress embroidered with stars. Ripa’s personification of Poetry is a woman, which Toorenvliet changed into an old man, a figure that is often found in his paintings from around 1675 to 1679. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghe des Verstands* (Amsterdam, 1644; reprint, Soest, 1971), 88–89; and Susanne Henriette Karau, “Leben und Werk des Leidener Malers Jacob Toorenvliet (1640–1719)” (PhD diss. Universität Berlin, 2002), 148.
6. I am grateful to Susanne Karau for updated information on the possible dating of this picture. For newly confirmed information about Toorenvliet’s stay in foreign countries, see Piet Bakker’s biography in this catalogue.
7. Charles Avery and Anthony Radcliffe, *Giambologna 1529–1608: Sculptor to the Medici* (Exh. cat. Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum; London, Victoria & Albert Museum; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) (London, 1978), 198–99, no. 192; Laura Olmstead Tonelli, “Academic Practice in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Children of Mercury: The Education of Artists in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Laurie Rubin (Exh. cat. Providence, R.I., Brown University and the Museum of Art) (Providence, R.I., 1984), 104–6, figs. 77, 80. Examples of *écorché* have survived in a variety of materials, like plaster, bronze, wax, terra cotta, ivory, and wood.
8. François Duquesnoy, *Bacchanal with Children and a Goat*, marble, 62.5 x 87.5 cm, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome. See Marion Boudon-Machuel, *François du Quesnoy 1597–1643* (Paris, 2005), no. 64b.
9. Michael Sweerts, *Painter’s Studio with a Model*, oil on canvas, 82 x 106 cm, Fondation Rau pour le Tiers-Monde, Zürich. See Peter Hecht, “Art Beats Nature, and Painting Does So Best of All: The Paragone



- Competition in Duquesnoy, Dou and Schalcken,” *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 192–93; Marion Boudon-Machuel, *François du Quesnoy 1597–1643* (Paris, 2005), 45–47, 175–86. Duquesnoy arrived in Rome in 1618 and became one of the key figures of classicism in that city, together with the French painter Nicolas Poussin, who moved to Rome in 1624.
10. Rolf Kultzen, *Michael Sweerts: Brussels 1618–Goa 1664* (Doornspijk, 1996), no. 1. The presence of Duquesnoy’s popular relief in this picture may even reflect actual studio practice that Toorenvliet encountered during his visit to Italy in the 1660s.
 11. In their paintings, Dou and his followers used the relief to decorate the lower wall of a stone window, which framed a genre scene. Marion Boudon-Machuel, *François du Quesnoy 1597–1643* (Paris, 2005), 53–55, 204–7.
 12. By depicting the relief, Dou probably intended to demonstrate the superiority of the art of painting over that of sculpture, a traditional theme of the *Paragone*. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675),” 3 vols. (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), for instance, no. 63. Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse Fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 101–3; Peter Hecht, “Art Beats Nature, and Painting Does So Best of All: The Paragone Competition in Duquesnoy, Dou and Schalcken,” *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 194–97; Annegret Laabs in *The Leiden fijnschilders from Dresden*, ed. Christiaan Vogelaar (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen) (Zwolle, 2000), 41; Marion Boudon-Machuel, *François du Quesnoy 1597–1643* (Paris, 2005), 205–6.
 13. Chittima Amornpichetkul, “Seventeenth-Century Italian Drawing Books: Their Origin and Development,” in *Children of Mercury: The Education of Artists in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Laurie Rubin (Exh. cat. Providence, R.I., Brown University and the Museum of Art) (Providence, R.I., 1984), 110–12. A famous example is *Il vero modo et ordine per dissegna tutte le partie et membra del corpo humano* (1608) by Odoardo Fialetti. Johannes Gellee’s *Tyrocinia artis pictoriae caelatoriae ac sculptoriae* is one example of the northern copies executed after early seventeenth-century academic drawing books from Italy (mainly that of Fialetti), which were published by Claes Jansz. Visscher in Amsterdam. See Jaap Bolten, *Method and Practice: Dutch and Flemish Drawing Books, 1600–1750* (Landau, 1985), 132–35.
 14. Jaap Bolten, *Abraham Bloemaert c. 1565–1651: The Drawings*, 2 vols. (2007), 1: 366, no. 1152; 2: 391.
 15. Rudi Ekkart, “Van Willem van Mieris tot Cornet,” in *Leids Kunstlegaat: Kunst en historie rondom Ars Aemula Natura*, ed. R. E. O. Ekkart (Leiden, 1974), 7–14; and Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse Fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 33.

Provenance



- Private collection, Europe (sale, Sotheby's, London, 4 December 1997, no. 135 [Bernheimer Fine Old Masters, Munich, 1998–2002; Bernheimer-Colnaghi, London, 2002–5; Jack Kilgore, New York, 2002–3]).
- Private collection, Europe, by 2005 [Bernheimer-Colnaghi, London, by 2008].
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- Munich, Bernheimer. “Musen, Mütter, Models: Das Bild der Frau in der Kunst,” 22 June–3 August 2007, no. 3.
- London, Colnaghi, “The Artist in Art,” 26 November 2007–1 February 2008, no. 63.
- 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].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, “Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection,” 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 32 [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. 20 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Bernheimer, Konrad O. *Bernheimer Fine Old Masters, Paintings*. Munich, 1999, 38–39.
- Karau, Susanne Henriette. “Leben und Werk des Leidener Malers Jacob Toorenvliet (1640–1719).” PhD diss. Universität Berlin, 2002, 146–48, no. B13.
- Bernheimer. *Musen, Mütter, Models. Das Bild der Frau in der Kunst*. Exh. cat. Munich, Bernheimer. Munich, 2007, 3, 12, no. 3.
- Colnaghi. *The Artist in Art*. Exh. cat. London, Colnaghi, in association with Emanuel von Baeyer. London, 2007, unpaginated, pl. 12, no. 63.

- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. “Allegory of Painting.” In *The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection*. Edited by Polina Lyubimova, 218–19; 247, no. 76. Translated by Daria Babich and Daria Kuzina. Exh. cat. Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts; St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum. Moscow, 2018.
- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. “The Leiden Collection and the Dutch Golden Age.” In *Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre*. Edited by Blaise Ducos and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 25. Exh. cat. Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi. London, 2019. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]
- 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, 174–75, no. 90. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]
- Lores-Chavez, Isabella. “Plaster Casts in the Life and Art of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painters.” PhD diss., Columbia University, 2022, 155; 339, fig. 3.22; 430.
- Van Cauwenberge, Caroline. “Jacob Toorenvliet, *Allegory of Painting*.” In *Rembrandt and His Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection*. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Caroline Van Cauwenberge, 142–13, no. 32. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam. Zwolle, 2023. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

Versions

Versions and Copies

1. Jacob Toorenvliet, *An Allegory of the Art*, oil on panel, 23.5 x 30 cm, present location unknown (sale, Sotheby’s, New York, 5 June 2002, no. 25).

Technical Summary

The support, a rectangular copper sheet, has subtle undulations, a slight convex bow, and flexes when handled. Two shallow diagonal creases emanate from the left vertical edge and intersect left of the female figure’s upper arm. There is one paper label, a black stencil, and numerical inscriptions but no wax seals or maker’s marks.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied with vertical brushwork. The paint has been extremely smoothly applied with delicate modeling, intricate detailing, and low brushmarking through the light highlights, flesh tones, and blue drapery.

The painting is recorded as having traces of signature in the lower left, however these traces are not readily apparent.^[1]



No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional changes visible in the images include a change in position of the female figure's proper right arm, which had originally been outstretched, her hand by the dog's head, a slight shift of her profile to the viewer's right, and a shift in position of the male figure's entire proper left hand, i. e. his pointer finger, his bent knuckles, and the angle of the back of his hand. A pentimento through the mahlstick indicates it was added after the book was painted.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2008 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Not readily apparent. Possibly in brown paint along the brown vertical plane between the row of books and the dog's head.