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Diana and Her Nymphs in a Clearing

Godefridus Schalcken
(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

ca. 1685–92
oil on canvas
82.6 x 66.4 cm
GS-111

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The goddess Diana, recognizable by the crescent moon in her beautifully pinned-up hair, is portrayed in wooded surroundings. Dressed in a short gown, as described by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, she holds a bloody arrow in her left hand and a bow in her right hand. Diana's companions—six nymphs—have sat down to rest after having tended to her hunting horn, quiver, cloak and one of the hounds; several other nymphs can be seen behind the trees in the background. This scene refers to Ovid's narrative:

> Here the goddess of the wild woods, when weary with the chase, was wont to bathe her maiden limbs in the crystal water. On this day, having come to the grotto, she gives to the keeping of her armor-bearer among her nymphs her hunting spear, her quiver, and her unstrung bow; another takes on her arm the robe she has laid by; two unbind her sandals from her feet. But Theban Crocale, defter than the rest, binds into a knot the locks which have fallen down her mistress's neck, her own locks streaming free the while (book 3, lines 162–70).[1]

Godefridus Schalcken certainly knew his Ovid.[2] His father, Cornelius Schalckius (1610/11–74), a doctor of theology, was rector of the Latin School in Dordrecht, which explains why he is known by the Latinized form of his name (Cornelis Schalcken). Godefridus attended his father's school, and was initially trained—as were his brothers Balthasar (1637–79) and Johannes (1660–1724)—to study theology, for which extensive knowledge of Latin was essential. Godefridus, however, struck out on his own path. In the words of Houbraken, his contemporary and fellow townsman, "his love of art made him bid farewell to the study of languages, even though he was far advanced in them."[3]

Diana and Her Nymphs in a Clearing also exists in two other versions, both of which are on panel. The best known version is to be found in the collection of the Counts of Schönborn at Schloss Weißenstein in Pommersfelden **(fig 1)**, where it has been documented since 1729.[4] The second version was last seen at a sale at Sotheby's in London in 1993. Beherman prefers this latter version to the one in Pommersfelden, probably for good reason, because it is now clear that it once belonged to the renowned eighteenth-century collections of Jan Bisschop (1680–1771) in Rotterdam and John Hope (1737–84) in Amsterdam.[5]

The three versions are nearly identical: apart from the support, they differ only in size. The version discussed here is on canvas and measures 82.6 x 66.4 cm, whereas the dimensions of the panel in Pommersfelden are 83 x 62 cm, and the work seen at the 1993 sale in London measured 84 x 66.5 cm. Despite the lack of a signature on all these versions, there is no reason to doubt Schalcken's authorship. It is striking,

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Diana and Her Nymphs*, ca. 1675–85, oil on copper, 83.5 x 66 cm, Sammlung Graf von Schönborn, Schloss Weißenstein, Pommersfelden

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however, that the master repeated this evidently successful composition more than once, so it is not unreasonable to assume that his pupils contributed significantly to one or more versions.

In general, versions on panel would have been preferred over those on canvas, because wooden supports were more expensive than linen. This rule, however, does not always apply to the work of Schalcken. We know, for example, that in 1690 he painted the portrait of Maria Anna of Pfalz-Neuburg (1667–1740), the sister of the Elector in Düsseldorf, on canvas, whereas the version produced by studio assistants is on panel.[6] Because the three versions of *Diana and Her Nymphs in a Clearing* are so close in quality, only firsthand comparison of all three works would enable one to determine which is Schalcken's autograph version and to what extent the replicas were produced by studio assistants.

Beherman dated the versions he knew to around 1680–85, which, in my opinion, is too early. The palette—with its pleasant, light colors verging in some cases on pastel shades—and the long, elegant figure of Diana indicate that all three versions must have originated later, sometime between about 1685 and 1692, the year Schalcken moved to London. In that period Schalcken had a number of his best pupils working in his studio: Arnold Boonen (1669–1729),[7] who was in any case active in the studio from 1 December 1685 to 3 December 1687; Richard Morris (1670–89),[8] who is documented on 1 December 1685 as Schalcken's pupil; and Justus van Bentum (1670–1727), whom we know only from listings in old catalogues, where he is mentioned as a pupil of Schalcken.[9] In view of Boonen's and Morris's success in approaching their teacher's manner, it certainly should come as no surprise that Schalcken managed, with the help of these three assistants, to produce three paintings of equally high quality.

Schalcken's subject of choice from sacred history was evidently Mary Magdalene, but the goddess Diana was his favorite theme from ancient history and mythology. His earliest Diana dates from around 1680, when he portrayed Magdalena de la Court (1661–1712) at approximately 18 years of age as the goddess of the hunt. He depicted her without a crescent moon adorning her hair, but with a bow and arrow hunting in a wooded landscape.[10] In the mid-1680s Schalcken used the genre of the *portrait historié* more frequently, when portraying, for example, several other young women as *Diana and Two Companions*, a painting for which a preparatory drawing survives.[11] This portrayal and the somewhat earlier *Goddess Diana Out Hunting in a Wood*, which some are also inclined to see as a *portrait historié*,[12] served as the examples for the three depictions of *Diana and Her Nymphs in a Clearing*, whose most important pictorial elements can be traced to those two works.

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- Guido Jansen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Eric Jan Sluijter pointed out this passage in 2009 in an e-mail to Nancy Minty. The English translation was taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition, translated by Frank Justus Miller and revised by G. P. Goold.
2. That Schalcken was very familiar with Ovid is apparent from the motto he gave one of his prints: *Man Wearing a Tall Hat Who Makes an Obscene Gesture with His Right Hand* bears the caption "Quam memiuisse juvat," a quotation from the *Metamorphoses*, book 9, verse 485; for the print, see George S. Keyes, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts ca. 1450–1700*, ed. Karel G. Boon, 58 vols. (Amsterdam, 1949–2010), 24: 152, no. 1 with illustration.
3. "De genegenheid tot de Konst deed hem de oeffening der talen, schoon hy daar in veer gevordert was, vaar wel zeggen." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1718–21), 3:175. Houbraken and Schalcken must have known each other well, for they cosigned a document drawn up by the notary Jacob van Dyck on 7 October 1689; Gemeentearchief Dordrecht, ONA 20.517, unnumbered folio. That Schalcken received an excellent, well-rounded education also emerges from the appreciative words written about him by George Vertue (1684–1756): "Besides his Art, his gracefull behaviour & courtesie gaind him respect & esteem among people of Qualitie & distinction" (see George Vertue, "Vertue Note Books volume II," *Walpole Society* 20 [1931–32]: 139). Proof of Schalcken's knowledge of Latin is provided by the dedication written by the German-born artist Johan Frederik Boddecker (1648–1727) on an engraving he made after Jan de Baen's portrait of the Hague physician Cornelis Solingen (1641–87), which he apparently presented to Schalcken. The handwritten dedication reads: *D. Godofredo Scalkio Apellis facile filio*. See the print sale presided over by Anton W. M. Mensing at Frederik Muller's in Amsterdam on 11 December 1906, lot 54 with illustration.
4. Hermann Maué and Sonja Brink, *Die Grafen von Schönborn: Kirchenfürsten, Sammler, Mäzene* (Exh. cat. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg) (Nuremberg, 1989), 437–38, no. 346; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 30bis.
5. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 30. This painting, last seen at a sale held at Sotheby's in London on 8 December 1993 (lot 105), was previously described with Jan Bisschop's collection in Gerard Hoet and Pieter Terwesten, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelven pryzen, zedert een langen reeks van jaaren zoo,* 3 vols. (The Hague, 1752–70), 2: 530. In the 1771 inventory of Bisschop's estate, it is listed as "Diana ter jagt gaande, zijnde een morgenstondt met veel beelden, h. 2:8, b. 2:2 d. [height 2:8, width 2:2 thumbs]" (Diana preparing for the hunt, being a dawn scene with many figures, approx. 84 x 68 cm; the conversion into centimeters is based on the Rhine thumb, which was the one commonly used in Rotterdam); E. Wiersum, "Het schilderijen-kabinet van Jan Bisschop te Rotterdam," *Oud Holland* 28 (1910): 172. Bisschop's collection of paintings was bought en bloc by John Hope in Amsterdam. After his death, a small part of the collection was sold at auction

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by his widow in Amsterdam on 10 August 1785. That sale included, in any case, lot 288: "Diana ter Jagt gaande, zynde een Morgenstond; op paneel, 32 x 26 d. [thumbs]" (Diana preparing for the hunt, being a dawn scene, on panel, approx. 82 x 67 cm; this conversion is based on the Amsterdam thumb); J. W. Niemeijer, "De kunstverzameling van John Hope (1737–1784)," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 32 (1981): 196. Given its large width, it is very likely that the work from the Bisschop and Hope collections appeared earlier in the sale of the collection of the burgomaster Mattheus van den Broucke in Dordrecht on 17 June 1717, where it was described as "Diana met haer Nymphen in een Bosch door Schalken, 2 en een drie vierde v. h., 2 v. 2 d. br. [height 2¾ feet, width 2 feet 2 thumbs]" (Diana with her nymphs in a forest by Schalcken, approx. 86 x 68 cm"; these measurements are based on the Rhine thumb); see Gerard Hoet and Pieter Terwesten, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelven pryzen,* 2 vols. ('s Gravenhage, 1752), 1:211, no. 5. This Van den Broucke Jr. was the son of the Dordrecht merchant and burgomaster of the same name, whose portrait Schalcken had previously painted and whose portrait by Samuel van Hoogstraten was engraved by Schalcken in 1677; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 80, with illustrations of both works. For Schalcken's print, see George S. Keyes, *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts ca. 1450–1700*, ed. Karel G. Boon, 58 vols. (Amsterdam, 1949–), 24:153, no. 3.

6. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 407, nos. 314 and 379; in 2012 the canvas was with the art dealer Johnny Van Haeften in London; see Guido M. C. Jansen in *Portret in portret in de Nederlandse kunst 1550-2012*, ed. Sabine Craft-Giepmans and Annette de Vries (Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) (Dordrecht, 2012), no. 36, 148–49, 307. An equally large repetition on panel by Schalcken's studio is now in a private collection in The Hague; Johannes Erichsen and Katharina Heinemann, eds., *Brennpunkt Europas 1704: Die Schlacht von Höchstädt—The Battle of Blenheim* (Ostfildern 2004), 98, no. 1.03, ill. in color on p. 30.
7. Schalcken was accustomed to taking his pupils along to the notary's whenever he had business there. Arnold Boonen, for example, and Schalcken cosigned notarial documents in Dordrecht from 1 December 1685 to 3 December 1687. This last document, drawn up by the notary F. Beudt (Gemeentearchief Dordrecht ONA 20.548 unnumbered folio) was signed not only by "Arnoldus" but also by his brother "Corstiaen Boonen," who can therefore also be registered as Schalcken's pupil and to whom a woman's portrait of 1694, signed "C.L. Boonen," can perhaps be attributed; see RKD databases, Excerpts, HdG-fiche 1059749.
8. On 1 December 1685, Richard Morris signed in full, together with Arnoldus Boonen, a document drawn up by the notary Arent van Neten, as evidenced by the act of conveyance for a hectare of land inherited by Françoisia van Diemen, Schalcken's wife; unpublished archival notes of Abraham Bredius, kept at the RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History), Schalcken file. Morris's only known painting, now on the Dutch art market, portrays an "Oude man met een uil op de hand" (Old man with an owl perched on his hand) and is described as such in the estate sale of Seger Tierens, held in The Hague on 23 July 1743, lot 166: "Een oud mannetje met een Uil op de Hand, door R. Moris, voornaam Discipel van G. Schalke, zynde vroeg gestorven, daarom weinig bekend, h. 1 voet en drie vierde d., br. 10 en een vierde

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d. [height 1 foot and ¾ thumb, width 10¼ thumbs]" (An old man with an owl perched on his hand, by R. Morris, distinguished pupil of G. Schalcken, having died young and therefore little known, 33 x 27 cm); Gerard Hoet and Pieter Terwesten, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelven pryzen, zedert een langen reeks van jaaren zoo,* 3 vols. (The Hague, 1752–70), 2: 108, no. 166.

9. See the entry on Justus van Bentum by J. Hein in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon,* 61 vols. (Sauer, 1982–), 9: 178–80.
10. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 165, no. 66.
11. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 119, no. 32; for the drawing, see in Guido M. C. Jansen, "Additions to Godfried Schalcken's Oeuvre as a Draftsman," *The Hoogsteder Mercury* 13–14 (1992): 77–78, ill. 7.
12. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 118, no. 31; see also the catalogue of the Van Haeften gallery in London, 1997, no. 34, as "A portrait of a lady as the Goddess Diana out hunting in a wood." In addition to the above-mentioned representations of Diana, we also know a *Bust of the Goddess Diana*; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 314, no. 218, last seen at a sale at Sotheby's in London, 7 December 1994, lot 256. An unpublished drawing of the same dimensions as the painting (black chalk, 45 x 32 cm) is now in the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden (inv. no. FM I-229). Although the drawing bears the signature *Dirck van Deyl delin: 1680(?)*, the work should be attributed to Schalcken himself. The *Hunting Diana* signed by Schalcken—which was sold on 3 July 1990 in London at Phillips as lot 106 (oil on panel, 27 x 21 cm) and acquired at that time by the Galleria Luigi Caretto in Turin—can no longer be assigned to Schalcken, because it is actually the work of a pupil or follower. See Caretto Gallerie, *Mostra maestri fiamminghi ed olandesi del XVI–XVII secolo* (exh. cat. Turin, Caretto Gallerie) (Turin, 1991), no. 28.

Provenance

- Possibly Mattheus van den Broucke (1620–85), Dordrecht (his sale, Dordrecht, 17 June 1717, no. 5).
- Possibly Jan Bisschop (1680–1771), Rotterdam (his sale, Rotterdam, 5–6 June, 24 June, 15 July 1771, p. 12).
- Possibly T.C.P. Haag (his sale, The Hague, 21 December 1812, no. 4 [to Leesberge for 70 florins].
- Baroness LeeAnn de Gidro (d. 1962), Budapest, Hungary, and New York, by 1938; by descent to her grandson, Michael Gidro, New York (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 24 January 2008, no. 10 [to Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd.]).
- [Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd., London]
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2008.

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Exhibition History

- Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2010–June 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017, no. 45 [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, no. 45 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 28 March–22 July 2018, no. 68 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019, no. 68 [lent by the present owner].
- Poughkeepsie, New York, "Changing Forms: Metamorphosis in Myth, Art, and Nature 1650–1700," 28 September–19 December 2021, no. 17 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, "Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 23 [lent by the present owner].

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Versions
Versions

1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Diana and Her Nymphs*, ca. 1680–85, oil on copper, 83.5 x 66 cm, Schönborn Collection, Schloss Weißenstein, Pommersfelden, inv. no. 520.
2. Attributed to Godefridus Schalcken, *Diana and Her Nymphs*, ca. 1680–85, oil on panel, 84 x 66.5 cm, previous sale, Sotheby’s, London, 8 December 1993, no. 105.
3. Jacob van Loo, after Godefridus Schalcken, *Diana and Her Nymphs*, n.d., oil on panel, 72 x 59.5 cm, previous sale, Sotheby’s, Amsterdam, 23 April 1979, no. 98.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of fine, twill-weave fabric, has been lined. All four tacking margins have been removed and paper tape extends into the face of the painting. Linear cracks and old tack holes along the perimeter indicate the outer edges of the image were once used as tacking margins and have since been turned out and reincorporated into the painting. There is slight cusping along all but the left edge. There are two paper labels and four numerical inscriptions on the stretcher members but no wax seals, canvas stamps or stencils on the lining fabric or stretcher reverse.

A double ground, red over gray, has been applied. The paint has been applied in both transparent glazes and opaque layers with smooth transitions with no use of impasto.

The landscape and shadowed figures are painted in transparent washes over the ground, and the brightly lit figures are painted opaquely. The red ground is used as a mid-tone.

A sketch executed in fluid medium is visible in infrared images captured at 780–1700 nanometers. Compositional alterations apparent in the images include the following: the profile of Diana’s proper left leg

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was changed; a bird drawn along the diagonal branch above the nymph was not executed in paint; the dog's snout was shifted; the back nymph facing forward and gazing down was painted over an intended tree trunk, which was painted narrower than sketched; and changes were made to the folds of the bright pink drape below the quiver. Almost none of the composition is visible in the X-radiograph; only the brightest highlights are radio-opaque.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2005 and remains in a good state of preservation.[1]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Entry based on 2011 examination report by Kate Smith, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and examination of the X-radiograph composite and image of reverse.

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