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**Elegant Shepherdess Listening to a  
Shepherd Playing the Recorder in an  
Arcadian Landscape**

Govaert Flinck  
(Kleve 1615 – 1660 Amsterdam)

1654

oil on canvas

139 x 170 cm

signed and dated lower left: "G flinck. f. 1654  
(?)"

GF-101



## How to cite

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Govaert Flinck's depiction of an amorous shepherd and shepherdess in the warm, evening light of a rolling landscape captures the lyrical character of the Dutch pastoral tradition.<sup>[1]</sup> The shepherd, dressed in a burnt umber robe, calf-high sandals, and a floppy brown hat, plays a recorder as he gazes longingly at the shepherdess seated beside him.<sup>[2]</sup> She returns her lover's gaze with a coy, sideways glance, while placing a rose on her garland of flowers. Her arm barely conceals the plunging neckline of her bodice, which she wears over a voluminous, blue satin skirt. A lamb grazes near the pair's feet, while the rest of the flock is visible beyond the shady enclosure of the trees.

The Leiden Collection painting is the only multi-figure pastoral landscape that Flinck executed during his career, and it reflects his familiarity with a broader pastoral tradition in the Netherlands. While Pieter Lastman (1583–1633) was the first to depict pastoral scenes, in Amsterdam in the 1610s, the genre most fully developed in Utrecht in the 1620s.<sup>[3]</sup> There, Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651), Paulus Moreelse (1571–1638), and Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656) began to produce half-length representations of shepherds and shepherdesses, popularizing the convention for pastoral images that quickly spread to cities such as Amsterdam and Dordrecht.<sup>[4]</sup> Flinck's own interest in pastoral subject matter began in the mid-1630s in the Amsterdam workshop of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), evident in his portraits of Rembrandt and Saskia as *Shepherd* (**fig 1**) and *Shepherdess* from 1636.<sup>[5]</sup> In the Leiden Collection work, Flinck more directly explored the Arcadian themes of love and music by depicting the figures in the acts of flute playing and garland making, roles that were traditionally associated with shepherds and shepherdesses.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Dutch interest in the portrayal of pastoral figures grew from a literary tradition that espoused the values of the simple, idyllic life of the shepherd. Works such as Pieter Cornelisz Hooft's *Granida*, published in 1615, and Johan van Heemskerck's *Batavische Arcadia*, from 1637, which were inspired by antique and Italian precedents, spurred the growing taste for pastoral cultural ideals.<sup>[7]</sup> The flowering of this genre was similarly evident in the production of Crispijn de Passe's book of engraved pastoral portraits, *Les vrais portraits de quelques unes des plus grandes dames de la Chrestiente, desguisées en bergères*, from 1640, as well as in the *Hofdicht*, or "country house" poetry and songbooks, of Jacob Cats, Jan Harmens Krul, and Joost van den Vondel, which were published in Amsterdam in the middle decades of the century.<sup>[8]</sup>

A number of Dutch artists in this period portrayed the interaction between an amorous shepherd and shepherdess in a landscape, largely without a specific

## Comparative Figures

**Fig 1.** Govaert Flinck, *Rembrandt as a Shepherd with Flute and Staff*, 1636, oil on canvas, 74.5 × 64 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv no.. SK-A-3451

**Fig 2.** Abraham Bloemaert, *Pastoral Scene*, 1627, oil on canvas, 61.3 x 74.8 cm, Landesmuseum, Hannover, © Landesmuseum Hannover – ARTOTHEK

narrative.<sup>[9]</sup> In his *Pastoral Scene* of 1627 (**fig 2**), for example, Abraham Bloemaert focused on the relationship between the shepherd and shepherdess in an expansive landscape.<sup>[10]</sup> The shepherdess, identified by her crook and gourd, engages the advances of the humble shepherd who brazenly places his flute under her skirt. This sense of amorous revelry resonates in Flinck's painting, although the relationship between the figures is more convincingly portrayed as one of reciprocal pastoral love. With her ivory skin, blond hair, and revealing neckline, Flinck's elegant shepherdess welcomes the flirtatious advances of her male companion. Flinck emphasized the sensuous nature of their interchange by positioning the woman's circular garland directly at the end of the shepherd's flute.<sup>[11]</sup> The soft, graceful forms of Flinck's figures and the earth-toned palette reflect the lyricism of the pastoral tradition and the evocation of Arcadian themes.<sup>[12]</sup>

The subject and character of the Leiden Collection painting are also consistent with the broader classicizing interests and style of history painters working in Amsterdam around 1650.<sup>[13]</sup> Artists such as Jacob Backer (1608/9–51), Ferdinand Bol (1616–80), Jacob van Loo (1614–70), and Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), turned increasingly to subjects drawn from or inspired by Dutch and Italian pastoral literature and mythology.<sup>[14]</sup> For example, in Bol's *Portrait of Leonard Winnincx and Helena van den Heuvel as Jason and Medea* (**fig 3**), from 1664, the couple's exchange similarly occurs in the foreground beneath a dense cluster of trees.<sup>[15]</sup> Although the eroticism of Bol's image is made more explicit by the woman's exposed breast, the large, solid figures and warm palette suggest the commonalities between Flinck and Bol's compositional and stylistic approaches. Flinck's broad, sweeping brushstrokes and looser handling of paint, however, distinguish this work from that of his contemporary and enhance its suggestive and elegant tone. These qualities would have made the Leiden Collection painting suitable as a chimneypiece in a sophisticated Amsterdam home, a setting that reflected the elite, intellectual circles in which Flinck operated in the seventeenth century.<sup>[16]</sup>

**Fig 3.** Ferdinand Bol, *Portrait of Leonard Winnincx and Helena van den Heuvel as Jason and Medea*, 1664, oil on canvas, 160.5 x 182.5 cm, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, ГЭ-760. Image is used from [www.hermitagemuseum.org](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org), courtesy of The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

## Endnotes

1. Before its sale at Sotheby's in Amsterdam in 2007, GF-101 had been in a Dutch private collection since the 1930s. In his monograph on Flinck, Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke included a possible second version of GF-101, previously in the collection of Jan Steen (1625/1626–79) (sale, Alkmaar, 12 August 1750). The author has been unable to locate a copy of this auction catalogue to confirm the existence of a second version. See Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 97, nos. 147 and 148a; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 2: no. 635. For Abraham Blooteling's engraving after GF-101, see Friedrich Wilhelm Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, 72 vols. (Amsterdam, 1949–2010), 2: 213, no. 101.
2. A similarly posed flute player can be seen in a drawing by Flinck in the Abrams Collection: Govaert Flinck, *Seated Flute Player*, black and white chalk on blue paper, 180 x 280 mm, Maida and George Abrams Collection, Boston.
3. Lastman executed four pastoral landscapes with figures in the 1610s and early 1620s, which Alison Kettering has identified as the earliest painted representations of this theme in the Netherlands: *Paris and Oenone*, 1610, oil on panel, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; *Landscape with Pastoral Figures*, ca. 1612, private collection, New York; *Paris and Oenone*, 1619, oil on panel, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts; and *Amorous Pastoral Couple*, 1624, Muzeum Narodowe, Gdańsk. The iconography of Lastman's paintings—whether they depict mythological narratives or were intended as pastoral scenes with erotic overtones—has been debated among scholars. The examples in Worcester and Atlanta, which have been identified as subjects taken from Ovid, suggest the former. Lastman's works had little impact on contemporaries, and while they mark an important prototype to GF-101, they do not share the monumentality and sensual character of Flinck's work. For Lastman's pastoral landscapes, see Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 88–89; Peter van den Brink, ed., *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993), no. 34; Martina Sitt, ed., *Pieter Lastman: In Rembrandts Schatten?* (Exh. cat. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle) (Munich, 2006), no. 7. Most recently, see the discussion of GF-101 and Lastman in Eric Jan Sluijter, "Out of Rembrandt's Shadow: Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol as History Painters," in *Ferdinand Bol and Govert Flinck—Rembrandt's Master Pupils*, ed. Norbert Middelkoop and David DeWitt (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum) (Zwolle, 2017), 110–12, no. 29, fig. 132.
4. The works of Bloemaert, Moreelse, and Van Honthorst influenced Rembrandt's first depictions of shepherdesses in Amsterdam in the mid-1630s, which may be considered the earliest examples of this type of painting outside of Utrecht, beyond Lastman. See, for instance, *Saskia as Flora*, 1634, oil on canvas, 125 x 101 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. For the pastoral tradition in the Dutch Republic, see Alison McNeil Kettering, "Rembrandt's 'Flute Player': A Unique Treatment of a



- Pastoral,” *Simiolus* 9, no. 1 (1977): 19–44; Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983); and Peter van den Brink, ed., *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993). For Dordrecht, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Albert Cuyp* (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, National Gallery; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (New York, 2001).
5. Flinck, *Shepherdess*, 1636, oil on canvas, 74.5 x 63.5 cm, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. Flinck turned to the depiction of half-length shepherds and shepherdesses on a number of occasions in the late 1630s and 1640s. See Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), nos. 127–46; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau, 1983–94), 2: nos. 655–56; Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 64, 78; Peter van den Brink, ed., *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993), nos. 23a and 23b. For Rembrandt’s pastoral subjects, see Alison McNeil Kettering, “Rembrandt’s ‘Flute Player’: A Unique Treatment of a Pastoral,” *Simiolus* 9, no. 1 (1977): 19–44; Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 61–62; 95–100. Rembrandt never rendered a multi-figure pastoral scene in a painting.
  6. The association between the shepherd and flute playing can be traced back to antiquity. In Virgil’s first *Eclogue*, for example, the shepherd’s occupation was “to brood on his slim pipe over the muse of the woodland.” The shepherdess’s activity was analogous to that of her companion. Garland making was an activity of leisure, indicative of the idyllic, rustic life, but the wreath itself also served as a symbol of love. Both objects carried sexual associations: the flute was perceived to have phallic connotations, while the wreath or garland was a symbol of the female genitals, as well as a woman’s virginity. See Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 92–95; and Eric Jan Sluijter, “De entree van de amoureuze herderidylle in de Noord-Nederlandse prent- en schilderkunst,” in *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Peter van den Brink (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993), 33–56.
  7. In the visual tradition, many Dutch images of shepherds had their roots in the sixteenth-century Venetian *concert champêtre*, as seen in works by Giorgione and Palma Vecchio. As Alison McNeil Kettering has noted, Dutch images tended to differ from the melancholic mood of their Italian predecessors. Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 92–95.
  8. These texts predominantly appeared in the period between 1618 and 1648. For a summary of Dutch pastoral literature, as well as Crispijn de Passe’s engravings, see Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 19–31, 75–77; and Peter van den Brink, ed., *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993).
  9. For a discussion of the emergence of the image of the shepherd pair in a landscape in the Netherlands, see Eric Jan Sluijter, “De entree van de amoureuze herderidylle in de Noord-Nederlandse prent- en

schilderkunst,” in *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Peter van den Brink (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993), 33–56. An early example is Jacob Matham after Hendrick Goltzius, *Cordion and Sylvia*, ca. 1600, engraving, 477 x 343 mm, Art Institute of Chicago.

10. For Bloemaert’s image, see Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 87; Peter van den Brink, ed., *Het Gedroomde Land: Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum) (Zwolle, 1993), no. 34. Abraham Bloemaert based his painting on a print series of pastoral subjects executed by Cornelis Bloemaert II (1603–84) in around 1625, titled *Otia delectant*.
11. The eroticism of this gesture likely reflected Flinck’s awareness of Rembrandt’s etching of a *Flute Player* from 1642, a work that Alison McNeil Kettering first associated with GF-101 in 1977. Although Kettering described certain iconographic and compositional similarities between Rembrandt’s and Flinck’s images, she did not point out the considerable differences between them. In Rembrandt’s print, the grisly looking shepherd lies on his stomach playing a transverse flute as he looks unabashedly up the shepherdess’s skirt. Although both forms of the flute—the upright recorder, or *flute à bec*, and the horizontally played transverse flute—had implied phallic connotations, Rembrandt’s positioning of the shepherd at the feet of the shepherdess and the suggestive angle of the flute conveyed a more explicit sexual intent. As Kettering has argued, this act of “crude voyeurism” was a significant departure from traditional pastoral iconography, and it is markedly absent from Flinck’s image. See Alison McNeil Kettering, “Rembrandt’s ‘Flute Player’: A Unique Treatment of a Pastoral,” *Simiolus* 9, no. 1 (1977): 19–44, particularly 41–42; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, 6 vols. (Landau and Pfalz, 1983–94), 2: no. 635; Alison McNeil Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Montclair, 1983), 88, 98, 162 n. 68. Flinck’s image also anticipates the more overtly erotic pastoral images that appeared after 1650 in the work of genre painters such as Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639[?]-84) and Adriaen van der Werff (1659–1722). See, for instance, Adriaen van der Werff, *Shepherd and Shepherdess in a Landscape*, 1689, oil on panel, 59 x 48 cm, Gemäldegalerie Dresden.
12. This approach is particularly evident in Flinck’s handling of the shepherd. Infrared images reveal a fluid and confident underdrawing for the shepherd’s head, hair, and garment. See Technical Summary for further discussion.
13. Although the last digit of the date in the lower-left corner is indistinct, this work has consistently been dated to 1654, a date that corresponds to Flinck’s more mature, classicizing style. In that same year, Flinck received a commission to complete an allegorical portrait for Amalia van Solms’s apartment at the Huis den Bosch, *Hope Comes to Amalia van Solms at the Tomb of Frederik Hendrik*, 1654, oil on canvas, 307 x 189 cm, Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis, The Hague.
14. See, for instance, Jacob Backer, *Granida and Daiflo*, ca. 1637, oil on canvas, 125 x 161.5 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Jacob van Loo, *Amarillis Crowning Mirtillo*, ca. 1650, oil on canvas, 161 x 192 cm, Instituut Collectie Nederland, Amsterdam.

15. Bol's painting, which was formerly known as *Bacchus and Ariadne*, has been identified more recently as a portrait historié of the Amsterdam couple Leonard Winnincx (1616–91) and his wife, Helena van den Heuvel (1638–98). The couple married in 1664. Their choice to be portrayed in the guise of mythological figures—and Frans Grijzenhout's recent determination that the painting hung prominently above the mantel in their salon—demonstrates the popularity and currency of these themes among Amsterdam's elite in the second half of the seventeenth century. See Frans Grijzenhout, "Ferdinand Bol's 'portrait historié' in the Hermitage: Identification and Interpretation," *Simiolus* 34, no. 1 (2009/2010), 33–49.
16. The size and format of GF-101 suggest that it was intended to be hung above a chimney or over mantel. Its pastoral subject matter would have easily found a receptive audience in the sophisticated circle of patrons—perhaps courtly circles—that Flinck knew and worked for in this period. See Tom van der Molen and Valentina Vlastic, *Govert Flinck—Reflecting History* (Exh. cat. Kleve, Museum Kurhaus Kleve) (Kleve, 2015), 127, 137, no. 21; and Eric Jan Sluijter, "Out of Rembrandt's Shadow: Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol as History Painters," in *Ferdinand Bol and Govert Flinck—Rembrandt's Master Pupils*, ed. Norbert Middelkoop and David DeWitt (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 2017), 110–12, cat. no. 29, fig. 132. For Flinck's networks as a painter, see Erna Kok, "Govert Flinck, Ferdinand Bol and Their Network of Influential Clients," in *Ferdinand Bol and Govert Flinck—Rembrandt's Master Pupils*, ed. Norbert Middelkoop and David DeWitt (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 2017), 58–79.

## Provenance

- Possibly Jan Steen (1625/6–79), Leiden (his sale, Alkmaar, 12 August 1750, no. 8).
- Anthonie H.G. Fokker (1890–1939), by 1938; thence by descent (sale, Amsterdam, 8 May 2007, no. 73 [Johnny van Haften Ltd., London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

## Exhibition History

- Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1939–45, on loan with the permanent collection [lent by the heirs of A.H.G. Fokker].
- Kleve, Museum Kurhaus Kleve, "Govert Flinck—Reflecting History," 4 October 2015–17 January 2016, no. 21 [lent by the present owner].



- Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis. “Ferdinand Bol and Govert Flinck—Rembrandt’s Master Pupils, 13 October 2017–18 February 2018, no. 29 [lent by the present owner].

## References

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- Blanc, Jan. “Being Modern, Being Dutch: The Seventeenth-Century Invention of the 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, 38. Exh. cat. Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi. London, 2019. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]

## Versions

### Prints

1. Abraham Blooteling (1634–90), after Govaert Flinck, *A Couple of Young Shepherds*, ca. 1655–90, etching and engraving, 283 x 355 mm.
2. John Smith (ca. 1652–ca. 1742), after Govaert Flinck, *Shepherd and Shepherdess with a Garland*, ca. 1683–1729, 167 x 210 mm.

## Technical Summary



The painting was executed on a plain, open-weave canvas of medium weight. The canvas had been lined previously with a wax adhesive. This lining was removed and replaced with a glue-paste lining in 2016. At some point in the painting's history, the tacking margins had been opened up and incorporated into the picture plane, expanding the size of the painting slightly. During the relining in 2016, the tacking margins on the top and sides were folded back over the stretcher, and along the bottom approximately half of the tacking margin was folded over the stretcher. Therefore the painting is now close to its original dimensions, but remains slightly expanded along the bottom edge.

The fabric support was prepared with a dark reddish-brown ground. Infrared photographs show a fairly detailed underdrawing executed in liquid medium for the shepherd, but not for the shepherdess. Flinck left the underdrawing exposed in some areas, for example in the drapery. The infrared photograph also reveals several small artist's changes, the most significant being an adjustment to lower the shepherdess's garment on her proper right shoulder and breast.

The paint was applied thinly and has become more translucent with time. Flinck left the warm ground exposed, or covered it with translucent glazes in some areas, such as the blue drapery and the landscape in the upper-left quadrant. Impasto is limited to highlights in the foreground landscape, flowers, and flesh.

The painting is in good condition. There is a vertical tear in the upper-left quadrant above the sheep and an L-shaped tear to the right of the shepherd's head. There are also two diagonal linear paint losses in the vessel in the right foreground, and other small, scattered losses throughout the composition. The paint has suffered some abrasion as well. The painting was treated in 2014 to resaturate the varnish and inpaint losses, and again in 2016 to remove the lining and replace it with a more suitable one, as well as to remove and replace the varnish and inpainting.

*This summary is based on an examination report by Simon Howell and Rachel Carey-Thomas dated December 4, 2012; a treatment report by Kirsten Younger dated January 8, 2014; notes from Timothy John Watson on treatment dated December 6, 2016, and December 20, 2016; and undated technical notes by Annette Rupprecht.*