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Portrait of a Woman

Godefridus Schalcken
(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

ca. 1675–85
oil on copper
13.4 x 10.9 cm
signed with a monogram in dark paint along background, lower left quadrant: “G. S.”
GS-110

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The art of painting portrait miniatures in the Northern and Southern Netherlands has little to do with “the art of limning” as it was practiced in England and France. English miniatures, which were usually executed in gouache, watercolor or enamel, differ from those produced in the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Holland and Flanders, such portraits were commonly painted in oil on a support of wood or metal (usually copper). Moreover, unlike the English specialists in this field, the artists who painted portrait miniatures in the Netherlands never considered miniatures their main activity. They painted these tiny portraits alongside their regular work.

The production of miniature portraits in the Netherlands was certainly not a Leiden specialty.[1] Nevertheless, it is striking that many Leiden artists—among them Gerrit Dou (1613–75); Frans van Mieris (1635–81), his sons Jan (1660–90) and Willem (1662–1747), and his grandson Frans II (1689–1763); Pieter van Slingelandt (1640–91); Ary de Vois (1630/35–80); Carel de Moor (1655–1738); and Godefridus Schalcken—produced signed work of this kind, not to mention the portrait miniatures attributable to Pieter Leermans (ca. 1670–85).[2] That such small likenesses enjoyed a certain degree of popularity was due in part to their relatively modest price, but above all to their intimate nature: they were easy to carry around, and could even be worn on clothing. Schalcken’s *Portrait of Maria Anna of Pfalz-Neuburg (1667–1740), Consort of Carlos II, King of Spain* of 1690 is but one example.[3]

Despite its considerable popularity among Dutch artists and sitters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the portrait miniature is no longer held in such high esteem, certainly not in the art historical literature. Schalcken’s contribution to this specialty is definitely the least appreciated part of his oeuvre. Up to now, portrait miniatures by his hand have been discussed merely in entries in catalogues *raisonnés* of his work. Beherman’s book includes only nine, and not all of them are by Schalcken.[4] Since Beherman’s publication, however, at least six more portrait miniatures signed by Schalcken have been found.[5]

One such recently discovered portrait is this exceptionally fine *Portrait of a Woman*, which the painter signed in monogram at the lower left. We see the young woman turning her head to her left as she looks at us with wide open eyes. She wears a blue-green dress with a low neckline, over which is draped a transparent ruche, held in place by a bejeweled broach. A string of pearls adorns her neck, but her most striking feature is her hairdo, a *hurluberlu* coiffure, in which the hair is drawn to the sides and falls in large ringlets over the shoulders. The rest of her hair is combed back and bound up in a large knot, or chignon, consisting of rolled-up braids. The chignon is held together by the string of pearls woven through it. The woman’s ears are

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Portrait of Coenraet Ruysch (1650-1731)*, May 1674, 9.2 x 7.5 cm, Private Collection, The Netherlands, © Dordrechts Museum / Marco de Nood

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decorated with pendant earrings made of gold wire and a large cut stone, probably a rock crystal. The light falls fully on her face and neck. The shadow at the left emphasizes the contours of the young lady's pretty face and sets it off from the background.

The *hurluberlu* coiffure makes it fairly easy to date the tiny portrait, because this hairdo became fashionable in Paris only after 1670. Moreover, the signature—the monogram *G.S.*—indicates that the portrait could not have been painted very early in the 1670s. Until around 1675 Schalcken customarily signed even the smallest of his works in full. He did this on two miniatures with genre scenes, but more relevant in the present context is the full signature on the portrait miniature of Coenraet Ruysch (1650–1731) **(fig 1)**, which Schalcken must have painted before Ruysch embarked on his Grand Tour in May 1674.[6] The other portrait miniatures by his hand were all produced later and bear his monogram, which means that this *Portrait of a Woman* can be dated to between ca. 1675 and the early 1680s, before the *hurluberlu* coiffure went out of fashion and was succeeded by the high *Fontange* coiffure (see GS-106).

A recently discovered portrait miniature is *Portrait of a Man in a White Wig*.[7] It is painted on copper, like the *Portrait of a Woman*, and is almost identical in size. Furthermore, it also bears Schalcken's monogram. This male portrait can be dated to around 1680–85, so it is quite possible that these two portraits once formed a pair.

Incidentally, Schalcken's activities in the field of miniature portraiture may well have prompted other painters in Dordrecht to attempt something similar. Schalcken's pupil Arnoldus Boonen (1669–1729), at any rate, also painted portraits in miniature format, as did Barend Kalraet and Arnold Houbraken.

- Guido Jansen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Among the many Dutch masters who created portrait miniatures were David Baudringhien, Job Berckheyde, Gerard ter Borch, Cornelis Jonson van Ceulen, Gerrit Lundens, Simon Luttichuys, Michiel van Musscher, Cornelis van Poelenburch, Abraham Snaphaen, Hendrick Sorgh, Jan Verkolje, Daniel Vertangen, and Adriaen van der Werff. Tiny portraits in oil remained popular remained popular in eighteenth-century Holland, which led such artists as Cornelis Troost, Jan Stolker, and Jan Maurits Quinkhard to practice this specialty.
2. See Peeter Leermans, *Portrait of a Man*, PLe-100.
3. Johnny van Haeften, *Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings* 18 (London, 2011), no. 26; more examples are to be found in Diana Scarisbrick, *Portrait Jewels: Opulence and Intimacy from the Medici to the Romanovs* (London, 2011).
4. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 69, 70, 102, 108, 123, 124, 228, 230, and 268. I am not certain that nos. 70 and 230 are by Schalcken. I define a miniature as having an admittedly arbitrary maximum height of 15 cm.
5. The six portrait miniatures in question include portrayals of Pieter Teding van Berkhout (RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) no. 123967) and his wife, Elisabeth Ruysch (RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) no. 123968); her brother Coenraad Ruysch (RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) no. 208865); and a woman who was probably the artist's wife, Françoisia van Diemen (RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) no. 198197); as well as the *Portrait of a Man in a White Wig* (see note 7), and the present painting.
6. Guido Jansen, "Ferdinand Voet and Coenraad Ruysch," *Burlington Magazine* 153 (2011): fig. 20 (oil on copper, 9.2 x 7.5 cm, oval). The portrait of the Leiden poet Willem van Heemskerck (oil on panel, 10 x 7 cm, oval) of 1676 is, as far as I know, the earliest dated portrait miniature with Schalcken's monogram. This small panel is not in Beherman, though it is included in Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, ed. and trans. Edward G. Hawke, 5: 411, no. 306. 8 vols. (London, 1907–28), originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten höllandischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts,* 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28). For several early and fully signed genre pieces in miniature format, see Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 133 and 135.
7. Sale, New York (Sotheby's), 27 January 2011, lot 280; signed in monogram; oil on copper, 13.2 x 10.9 cm.

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Provenance

- (Sale, Sotheby's, New York, 8 January 2008, no. 298).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2008.

References

Fowler, Pamela, and Piet Bakker. *Carel de Moor (1655–1738): His Life and Work, a Catalogue Raisonné.* Leiden, 2024, 73, fig. 3.1.

Technical Summary

The support, an oval-shaped copper sheet, has burrs along the edges. There are no obvious hammer or roll marks, but the copper has substantial weight and does not flex when handled.[1] The copper remains in plane with no indentations. There is a brown mottled oxidation layer followed by a hazy white layer along the reverse. There are no wax seals, stamps, stencils or labels along the reverse.

No ground is visible.[2] The paint has been applied smoothly wet-into-wet through the background and hair, smoothly with dry paint and visible brushwork through the flesh tones, and with low rounded dots to create the highlights of the pearl necklace, gold earring, and jewel along the mousseline. Raised pin-sized dots of paint, particularly along the left half of the brown background, appear to be gritty inclusions or the result of oxidation products.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers, and no compositional changes are visible in the images or as pentimenti. There is no X-radiograph of the painting.

The painting is signed with a monogram in dark paint in the background along the lower left quadrant but is undated.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2008 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. According to Isabel Horovitz, *Copper as Canvas: Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper, 1575–1775* (New York, 1999), 67–68, "a highly worked sheet of copper will be less flexible than one that is not highly worked, and this is why quite thin (0.5 mm) sheets of copper can provide such excellent rigid supports for paint films."
2. The painting was examined on-site with no stereomicroscope. Magnification with 5X Optivisor.

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