



Godefridus Schalcken
Dutch, 1643 - 1706

Woman Weaving a Crown of Flowers

c. 1675/1680

oil on panel

overall: 26.7 x 20.3 cm (10 1/2 x 8 in.)

framed: 37.6 x 31.4 x 5.1 cm (14 13/16 x 12 3/8 x 2 in.)

Inscription: lower left: G. Schalcken

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ENTRY

This charming painting of a woman lost in thought while weaving a crown of flowers is an excellent example of Schalcken's refined manner of painting and also of the way he infused abstract ideas into his genre scenes.[1] The woman's distinctive features—her long nose and high cheekbones—are elegant and refined. She has a delicacy, even fragility, that is also suggested in the wispy strands of her hair and the bluish cast of her thin skin near her temple. These physical characteristics lend great poignancy to her gaze, which suggests a yearning for love and companionship. The wreath of flowers she sews onto a circular band alludes to this theme, as does the standing cupid atop the marble fountain on which she rests her elbow. As though providing the physical manifestation of her thoughts, Schalcken has depicted lovers embracing in the distant garden. The crack in the stone base of the fountain offers a subtle reminder, however, that love and life, even when built upon a firm foundation, are fragile and transient.

In Dutch emblematic traditions the wreath of flowers was symbolically associated with love and virginity.[2] In Cesare Ripa's emblem book, the personification of Virginity (*longhvrouwschap*, *Maeghdelijcke Staet*) wears a wreath of flowers to signify that a young woman is as a blossom to be plucked before its beauty and appeal are lost.[3] However, the specific flowers in the woman's wreath—the exquisite blue flax, the lighter blue cornflower, the delicate white baby's breath, the bell-shaped white morning glory, and the yellow and orange daisylike flowers, probably marigolds—are not symbolically associated with joy and hope, but with

constancy, loss, and mourning.[4] The wistful mood of the *Woman Weaving a Crown of Flowers*, therefore, may reflect an unmarried woman's desire for love at a time when she fears that intimate companionship, such as that enjoyed by the couple in the distant garden, may well pass her by.

Schalcken featured the same model in a painting he executed around 1680, *Préciosa Recognized*, in which she posed for the figure of Giomaer, Préciosa's mother [fig. 1].[5] Her presence in that painting helps establish a chronological framework for *Woman Weaving a Crown of Flowers* and furthermore affirms the visual impression that she is not young. The woman's delicate gold necklace and elegant dangling earrings, as well as her placement next to the elaborately carved stone fountain, indicate that she was a member of the Dutch elite.

The woman's distinctive costume, particularly her brown jacket with its striped decorative pattern, also indicates a date from the mid-to-late 1670s. According to costume expert Marieke de Winkel, it reflects French styles that came into fashion in those years. Such jackets were, however, generally worn with lace at the neck and sleeves rather than with a loosely tied translucent shawl.[6] Schalcken's imaginative changes to the woman's wardrobe give her a timeless quality, consistent with the generically classical forms of the distant buildings and garden fountain. Enhancing the arcadian quality of the image are the woman's straw hat, colored blue under its wide brim, and the red shoulder piece, or *kletje*, she wears under her shawl, clothing items generally associated with shepherdesses. Arnold Houbraken indicates that Schalcken went to Leiden in 1662 to study with Gerrit Dou (Dutch, 1613 - 1675) after his first teacher, Samuel van Hoogstraten (Dutch, 1627 - 1678), left Dordrecht for England.[7] Nevertheless, the refined elegance of this work is more closely connected to Frans van Mieris (Dutch, 1635 - 1681) than to Dou.[8] Van Mieris and Schalcken were both fascinated with issues related to the psychological states of women, which they explored in their genre paintings and allegorical scenes. In these works, the gaze takes on great significance, becoming the fulcrum around which all of the surrounding pictorial accoutrements must be understood.[9]

Many of Schalcken's and Van Mieris' paintings deal with lost innocence or with the balancing of human and spiritual values, as in a remarkable pair of pendant paintings that these artists made together in 1676: *Allegory of Virtue and Riches* (also called *Lesbia Weighing Her Sparrow against Jewels*) by Schalcken [fig. 2], and *The Flown Bird: Allegory on the Loss of Virginity* (also called *Lesbia Allowing Her Sparrow to Escape from a Box*) by Van Mieris.[10] Compositionally, the focus

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on a single female situated near a garden sculpture and before an arcadian landscape in Schalcken's *Allegory of Virtue and Riches* is comparable to *Woman Weaving a Crown of Flowers*. Stylistically, however, the modeling of the two women is different, with the young woman in the allegory being far more idealized and generalized than is the woman creating her wreath, who has a more portraitlike character.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Godefridus Schalcken, *Préciosa Recognized*, 1665–1670, oil on panel, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland



fig. 2 Godefridus Schalcken, *Allegory of Virtue and Riches*, c. 1667, oil on copper, National Gallery, London, no. 199. Photo © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

NOTES

- [1] I would like to thank Anneke Wertheim for her assistance in writing this entry.
- [2] See Alison McNeil Kettering, “Rembrandt’s *Flute Player*: A Unique Treatment of Pastoral,” *Simiolus* 9, no. 1 (1977): 35–38. For further discussion of the symbolism of the wreath of flowers, see Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt in trouw—huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Haarlem, 1986), 254.
- [3] Jacob Cats, *Maechden-Plicht ofte Ampt der lonck-vrouwen, in eerbaer Liefde, aen-ghewesen door Sinne-Beelden* (Middelburgh, 1618), 1; Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia Uytbeeldinghe des Verstands* (Amsterdam, 1644; reprint, Soest, 1971), 223.
- [4] I would like to thank Genevra Higgenson for identifying the flowers and indicating their symbolism (correspondence of April 25, 2005, in NGA curatorial records). Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) can connote the linen in which Christ was swaddled as a babe; cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) was associated with loyalty, constancy, and celibacy; baby’s breath (*Gypsophila*) denotes self-reliance; morning glory (*Convolvulus* genus) is linked to wisdom, but as it closes at night, it has sad connotations; marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) often adorned the Virgin Mary and symbolizes grief.
- [5] The date of c. 1680 for this painting, which is in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, can be postulated through its stylistic similarities to Frans van Mieris’ *The Death of Lucretia*, 1679 (see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris [1635–1681], the Elder*, 2 vols. [Doornspijk, 1981], 2:120, no. 116), a connection noted in Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 142, no. 49. The subject of the Dublin painting is based on a short novel by

Miguel de Cervantes, *La Gitanilla*, which was published in 1613 in *Novelas ejemplares* (Madrid, 1613) and translated into Dutch in 1643.

- [6] Marieke de Winkel, correspondence dated April 3, 2005, in NGA curatorial files. Winkel expressly associates the jacket with one seen in the doll house of Petronella Dunois, dated 1676.
- [7] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3:175
- [8] For stylistic and thematic connections between Schalcken and Van Mieris, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681), the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:72. A further point of contact between the two artists was apparently Karel de Moor (1655–1738), who became a student of Schalcken's in Dordrecht after having studied with Van Mieris in Leiden around 1670.
- [9] See, for example, Van Mieris' *The Broken Egg*, c. 1655–1657, oil on copper, Hermitage, Saint Petersburg (see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris [1635–1681], the Elder*, 2 vols. [Doornspijk, 1981], 2:19–20, no. 17); and *A Woman Before a Mirror*, c. 1662, oil on panel, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris [1635–1681], the Elder*, 2 vols. [Doornspijk, 1981], 2:56, no. 46).
- [10] These works—Schalcken's *Allegory of Virtue and Riches* in the National Gallery, London, and Van Mieris' so-called *Lesbia Allowing Her Sparrow to Escape from a Box*, 1676, oil on panel, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam—were listed as pendants in the collection of the Greffiers Fagel from The Hague in 1752. See Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681), the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:82, 2:116, no. 108; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 145, no. 50; and Neil MacLaren, *The Dutch School, 1600–1900*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1991), 1:416, no. 199, where the title of Van Mieris' painting is given as *Allegory of Virtue and Riches*. Other connections between Schalcken and Van Mieris exist during the 1670s, as in *Préciosa Recognized*. In *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681), the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:82, Otto Naumann argues that Schalcken's painting slightly postdates that of Van Mieris.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The small painting is on a vertically grained, single-member oak panel,[1] which is finished with beveled edges on the back. Narrow, nonoriginal wood strips have been nailed to the panel's perimeter. The panel has an off-white ground layer. Both the ground and the paint are rather thin and as a result, the panel's wood-grain

texture is visible. The paint was applied in multiple overlapping opaque and transparent layers. The foliage is painted with a low-impasted paint that stands proud of the surface. Details such as the sitter's blonde tendrils and her black snood were painted wet-into-wet, while other details, including the sprigging on her dress and the splashing water, were painted wet-over-dry. There is a visible pentimento in the sitter's neck where the artist widened it slightly.

The painting is in excellent structural and visual condition. Areas of tiny traction cracks in the paint, due to the artist's technique, have been finely inpainted. The blue foliage at the lower right suggests the presence of a faded yellow pigment or glaze. The varnish is thin and even, but slightly hazy. The painting has not been treated since acquisition.

[1] The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination only.

PROVENANCE

Graf Lothar Franz von Schönborn [1655-1729], Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden, from at least 1719;[1] by descent in the Schönborn family; (Schönborn sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 17-18 and 22-23 May 1867, no. 111); purchased by De l'Espine. Comte de L*** [Lambertye or Lépine], Paris; (his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 15 April 1868, no. 57). Goldschmidt collection, Paris; (his sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 14 and 16-17 May 1898, no. 97); purchased by Fischer. Gabriel Cognacq [1880-1951], Paris; (his estate sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 11-13 June 1952, no. 87); Princess Ermina Tonsson, Washington, D.C.; (sale, Christie's East, New York, 19 November 1980, no. 197); (P. de Boer, Amsterdam); purchased c. 1981 by private collection, New Rochelle, New York; (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 22 January 2004, no. 25); (Colnaghi, London); sold 16 March 2005 to NGA.

[1] The painting is listed in catalogues of the Schönborn collection published in 1719 (*Fürtrefflicher Gemähld- und Bilder-Schatz / So in denen Gallerie und Zimmern / des Churfürstl. Pommersfeldischen...*, Bamberg, 1719: no. 57); 1746 (*Beschreibung des Fürtrefflichen Gemähld- und Bilder-Schatzes...*, Würzburg, 1746); and 1857 (*Katalog der Gräflich von Schönborn'schen Bilder-Gallerie zu Pommersfelden*, Würzburg, 1857: no. 96).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1950 Chefs-d'oeuvres des collections parisiennes, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, 1950, no. 74, as La faiseuse de bouquets.

1981 Voorjaarstentoonstelling van nieuwe aanwinsten, Galerie P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 1981.

1988 Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Collections, National Academy of Design, New York, 1988, no. 46, repro., as Young Woman Weaving a Garland.

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- 1907 Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907-1928: 5(1912):362, no. 135.
- 1950 Musée Carnavalet. *Chefs-d'oeuvre des collections Parisiennes*. Exh. cat. Musée Carnavalet, Paris, 1950: 40-41, no. 74.
- 1986 Hecht, Peter, and Ger Luijten. "Nederland Verzamelt Oude Meesters Tien Jaar Aankopen en Achtergronden." *Kunstschrift Openbaar Kunstbezit* 30 (1986): 213-214, fig. 57.
- 1988 Adams, Ann Jensen. *Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Private Collections*. Exh. cat. National Academy of Design, New York, 1988: 11, no. 46.
- 1988 Beherman, Thierry. *Godfried Schalcken*. Paris, 1988: 244, no. 150.
- 2007 Howard, Jeremy. "Two Years in Review at Colnaghi." In *Colnaghi Old Master Paintings*. London, 2007: introduction, fig. 7.

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