

An unexpected collaboration: Jan Olis (c. 1610-1676) and Jacques de Claeuw (1623-1694)*

In 1937, an attractive painting of a young couple was auctioned in London (fig. 1).¹ A girl picks up a branch of plums from a selection of fruit offered to her on a large cabbage leaf by a young man, recognizable as a shepherd by the staff he holds, and she presents the plums to the viewer. Presently, this painting is unfortunately known only from a black-and-white photo of which there is a print of excellent quality in the RKD files. At the time of the auction, the painting, which is apparently not signed, was attributed to Hendrick ter Brugghen. At some point, probably during the 1960s, RKD curator (and subsequent director) Sturla Gudlaugsson tentatively assigned the painting to Salomon de Bray; it carried that attribution on the RKD mount until recently.

In 2005, I published an article in this periodical on Jan Olis's paintings of larger figures.² At the time I was not aware of the canvas illustrated in figure 1, but in hindsight, it could – and should – have been included in that publication.³ In many respects, the painting can be connected with works by Olis of this type from roughly the first half of the 1640s, such as a *Portrait of a family*, dated 1642 (fig. 2).⁴ The facial types, the hands and the treatment of textiles in those paintings, among other features, are very similar. The girl in the painting in figure 1 could almost be a sister of the lady portrayed with her husband and child in Olis's *Portrait of a family*. The fruit the shepherd is offering her, moreover, is similar in treatment to the fruit on the family's table and to fruit in other works by Olis, such as his (later) *Vertumnus and Pomona*.⁵

The wreath of flowers that the shepherdess wears in her hair, however, is quite different in treatment from anything in Olis's known paintings, which suggests that it may be the work of another hand. In fact, it is strongly reminiscent of flowers in paintings by Jacques de Claeuw, such as the one reproduced in figure 3.⁶



¹ Here attributed to Jan Olis and Jacques de Claeuw, *A girl, offered fruit by a young shepherd*, oil on canvas, 127 x 107 cm. Present location unknown.



² Jan Olis, *Portrait of a family*, signed with monogram and dated 1642, oil on canvas, 140 x 109 cm. Private collection, Germany.



³ Jacques de Claeuw, *Floral still life*, signed and dated 1651, oil on panel, 68 x 50 cm. Present location unknown.

When we look at both artists' biographies, we see that Jan Olis lived and worked in Dordrecht for about a decade, between 1632 and 1643. Jacques de Claeuw started his career as an artist in Dordrecht and left the city in 1646. By the time Olis left Dordrecht, de Claeuw was twenty years old and an accomplished master painter.⁷ This would mean that, if Olis and de Claeuw worked together on this painting, this occurred most likely in 1642 or 1643, which coincides with the date of Olis's family portrait in figure 2, which provides one of the closest comparisons for attributing this work to Jan Olis. Although judging from the excellent photo it seems unlikely that the floral wreath was a later addition, it will require inspection of the canvas itself to be able to confirm this with any degree of certainty. In view of de Claeuw's handling, however, and because of the fact that he left Dordrecht in 1646 it is highly unlikely to have been done no more than a few years later. For the moment, it appears to be entirely plausible to suggest that, for whatever reason, Jacques de Claeuw painted this wreath of flowers on the shepherdess's head in Jan Olis's painting in 1642 or 1643.

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NOTES

* With thanks to Beth Vogel for editing my English text.

¹ Sale London, Christie's, 7 May 1937, lot 120, as "Terbruggen".

² F.G. Meijer, 'Jan Olis (c. 1610-1676) as a painter of larger figures', *Oud Holland* 118 (2005), pp. 92-102.

³ A painting of a *Penitent Magdalen with a skull*, oil on canvas, 69,8 x 59,6 cm, recently attributed to Jan Olis by Paul Huys Janssen (*Recent Acquisitions*, Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, New York, 2010, cat. no. 5, colour ill.) is in my view not by Jan Olis. Unfortunately I have no suggestion for a proper attribution for the painting.

⁴ Other comparisons are provided by figures 6, 9 and 10 in Meijer 2005 (see note 2).

⁵ Meijer 2005 (note 2), fig. 11.

⁶ I have chosen to reproduce this signed work, which is dated 1651, since many of de Claeuw's known floral still lifes are not signed. Their treatment is rather consistent, however, and already in 1647, in a list of paintings sold in The Hague, several flower paintings (*blompotten*) by de Claeuw were recorded, see A. Bredius (ed.), *Kunstler-Inventare. Urkunden zur Geschichte der holländischen Kunst des XVten, XVIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhunderts*, Vol. I, The Hague,

1915, pp. 462 (no. 66), 466 (no. 136), 502 (no. 21), as well as many "principalen" (originals) by the Claeuw of which the subject is not specified.

⁷ In A. van der Willigen and F.G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-Life Painters Working in Oils, 1525-1725*, Leiden, 2003, p. 62, we stated (on the basis of Aat van der Willigen's manuscript) that '[in Dordrecht] in 1642 he [de Claeuw] was a co-founder of the painters' guild'. This cannot be correct, however. Upon renewed research, I have not found any such event, nor data concerning de Claeuw's connection with the Dordrecht guild.