



Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp: Problems of Collaboration

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Looking at art in the company of Wouter Kloek, a keen and insightful observer, has proven immensely rewarding for me as we worked together on the exhibition of Netherlandish still lifes shown at the Rijksmuseum and the Cleveland Museum of Art, and again on shows dedicated to Aelbert Cuyp and Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp.

The exhibition at the Dordrechts Museum in 2002 provided a welcome opportunity to survey the work of Jacob Cuyp, the Dordrecht polymath.¹ Many of the views advanced in the exhibition can now be revised with the added insight yielded by paintings that have recently surfaced. Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594-1652), competent but not exceptionally gifted, probably painted a wider range of subjects than any other seventeenth-century Dutch artist – from portraits and history pictures to market and kitchen scenes. Ironically, he was least adept at landscape, the great strength of his son and sometime collaborator Aelbert. Indeed scholars have tended to be interested in Jacob Cuyp because of his connections with Aelbert, and we have frequently been lured into detecting collaborations between the two.

To Jacob Cuyp's long list of specializations, we may be able to add that of Vanitas still life, since a striking

Detail of fig 2.

canvas in this genre has recently come to light (fig. 1).² Arranged on a table covered with green cloth are a vase of flowers, a gilded tazza and double-cup, a horse's skull, a breast-plate, a viola da gamba with printed music, money bags and coins, a human skull, an hour glass and several books. On the front edge of the table, beside the open account book, is a slate tablet inscribed, 'Bereyt u selven / want ghy sult / sterven / Eert te laet is' (Prepare yourself for you shall die, before it is too late). The objects are almost stereotypically symbolic of worldly pursuits, the passing of time and ultimately of the transience of human life.

But the most remarkable component of the painting – and indeed a unique feature in Dutch still-life painting – is the winged child holding a shell with soapy water and a straw through which he has blown bubbles. This putto is far more reminiscent of seventeenth-century Spanish still lifes by, for example, Antonio de Pereda, as seen in a work of around 1634 (Kunst-historisches Museum, Vienna) and later examples.³ Putti can be found in Flemish paintings – in the allegories of Jan Breughel the Elder and in a Vanitas still life by Pieter Boel (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), and there is a Cupid who presides over a still life sometimes titled *Amor Vincit*



Fig. 1
 ATTRIBUTED TO
 JACOB CUYYP,
*Allegory of
 Transience*.
 Oil on canvas,
 102.5 x 178 cm.
 Rob Smeets, Milan

Omnia (Love Conquers All) by Cornelis de Vos (Vienna) – but the specific combination of a winged child blowing bubbles together with a still life can only be found in Jacob Marrell's *Vanitas* of 1637 (Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt), where the figure, paired with a putto holding an hourglass, is part of the painted decoration of an arch.⁴ On the other hand, Jacob Cuyyp portrays his putto as a flesh-and-blood child, with abundantly curly hair and tangible wings. Otherwise, many of the still-life elements are identical in both paintings.

Jacob Cuyyp's angelic figure depends in only a very general sense on Hendrik Goltzius's print dated 1594 showing a boy leaning casually on a skull as he blows bubbles. The poem below compares bubbles to ephemeral smoke and floral fragrance, while the title, *Quis Evadet*, asks who can evade death. Goltzius's boy, however, does not have wings, and thus seems to be associated with 'disguised realism'. Jacob Cuyyp's putto more closely resembles the Cupids blowing bubbles

depicted by Rembrandt in 1634 (Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna) and Bartholomeus van der Helst in 1641 (private collection).⁵ Jan Baptist Bedaux has advanced the suggestion that these Cupids are actually portraits of dead children, the bubbles referring to the shortness of their lives, rather than more obviously to the transience of erotic love, as had been a tradition for centuries.⁶ However, both Rembrandt and Van der Helst clearly accoured their subjects as Cupid, with multi-coloured wings and quivers of arrows. Moreover their impish grins and the light-hearted manner of their deportment, like Jacob Cuyyp's naughty youngster, argue against identifying them as the sombre cherubs sometimes found in Dutch group portraits.⁷ Is it possible that Jacob Cuyyp's putto was inspired in some way by Rembrandt's Cupid?

The winged child in Jacob Cuyyp's painting may not be a specific representation of Cupid since he lacks the god's quiver, although in the context of the painting the ephemerality of erotic love accords well with the theme

of human vanity. If the boy is a more generic allegorical putto, he plays a supporting role like the boys and maids seen in Jacob Cuyyp's kitchen scenes.⁸ In any case, the painting is a unique conflation of Vanitas still life with figural allegory.

That this remarkable painting is by Jacob Cuyyp is perhaps not immediately evident, since it is not signed nor is the artist known to have painted other still lifes of this type. The paint surface is also flattened and worn in places. However, the flowers in the vase can be recognized in two of Jacob Cuyyp's signed paintings of shepherdesses from 1627 and 1628: the same rose, for example, occurs in the Rijksmuseum's canvas (fig. 2).⁹ The impish putto strikes a pose familiar from many of Cuyyp's portraits of children, while the thick fabric bunched at his waist is also handled in the artist's typical fashion. Although the *Allegory of Transience* can be compared with paintings of the late 1620s, the smoother and more

elegant handling of the child's face is closer to works from a decade later, such as the portrait of two children dated 1638 (Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne) where similar costumes can be found, as well as analogous objects in the foreground, such as jewels, coins and shells.¹⁰ One might imagine that while Jacob Cuyyp painted the flowers and the figure, another artist might have been responsible for the objects on the table. However, the technique seems uniform throughout the canvas, while the awkward perspective of the viola da gamba and the uncertain positioning of objects at the back of the table indicate that the artist was not at home in this genre. Taking these factors together, the painting appears to be the work of Jacob Cuyyp (or at minimum an early workshop replica of an original).

Jacob Cuyyp painted other types of still lifes, especially kitchens and market scenes,¹¹ and even made one attempt at depicting a laid table, in a

Fig. 2
JACOB CUYYP,
*Shepherdess
with a Child*, 1628.
Oil on canvas,
112 x 168 cm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam





genre scene showing two men smoking and drinking (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).¹² More important, inventories suggest that Jacob Cuyyp painted other paintings of this type. Aert Teggers's inventory of 1688 lists two still lifes by Jacob Gerritsz Cuyyp, one depicting poultry and game while the other is described as 'Een fanetassie' (A Vanitas).¹³ Johan van Beverwijk (1594-1647), the doctor who wrote *Van de Wtnemetheyt van vrouwelicken geslachts* (for which Jacob Cuyyp provided four illustrations) and his wife, Elisabeth de Backere, owned 'Een schilderije van drie Cupidoon van Mr. Jacob Kuyp f. 30' (A painting of three Cupids by Jacob Cuyyp, 30 guilders).¹⁴

Scholars have scoured Jacob Cuyyp's paintings for evidence of Aelbert Cuyyp's more desirable participation. As early as 1888, Abraham Bredius detected Aelbert's hand in the landscape background of a portrait of children dated 1638 (Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne).¹⁵ Although this theory was unfounded, two group portraits by Jacob Cuyyp dated 1641 (Jerusalem and Buenos Aires) do

possess extensive landscapes by Aelbert.¹⁶ I was also lured into believing that two paintings by Jacob Cuyyp contained early landscapes by Aelbert. It was only when a painting of shepherds in Montauban (fig. 3) could be examined closely and in good light during the Dordrecht exhibition of 2002 that it became obvious that the painting was by Jacob Cuyyp alone.¹⁷ The broad horizontal strokes used to render the distant view is typical of Jacob, who did not attempt to capture subtle reflections and variegated colours in extensive landscapes as Aelbert Cuyyp always did. Thus the motif of the panorama, usually punctuated with a view over a cliff, as backdrop for figures appears to have been adopted by Jacob Cuyyp on his own in the period between 1635 and 1638. His paintings of figures in landscapes dating from 1630 to 1635 typically use a city skyline or a screen of trees to fence in the foreground figures.¹⁸ By 1638, a sweeping landscape (often with cattle) forms the open setting for figures.

A long-lost painting, which I thought might have been another early collaboration between Jacob and Aelbert

Fig. 3
JACOB CUYYP,
*Shepherds in a
Landscape*, ca. 1638.
Oil on canvas,
110 x 166 cm.
Musée Ingres,
Montauban

Cuyp, recently came to light (fig. 4).¹⁹ Once again, the distant panorama is not by the younger Cuyp. Moreover the painting has been heavily reworked and can only be tentatively assigned to Jacob Cuyp or to his workshop. The supposed signature with a date of 1659 or 1639 is probably a transcription of a signature by Jacob Cuyp. A related portrait of children in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. 34.83.1) has recently been implausibly catalogued as attributed to Aelbert Cuyp.²⁰

Several other paintings exhibited in Dordrecht as by Jacob Cuyp have proven in the context of signed works to be by other artists. Among these is a boy in a straw hat in Frankfurt which Mirjam Neumeister has recently tentatively assigned to Pieter Soutman.²¹ An iconographically fascinating portrait of a four-year-old girl holding a fish and a cat has little in common with works by Jacob Cuyp.²² Görel

Cavalli-Björkman has recently discovered that two paintings long considered to be by Jacob Cuyp are probably by Willem van Vliet and were detached from a single painting.²³ A painting of the Annunciation to the Shepherds is also not by Jacob Cuyp.²⁴

An impressive portrait of two children, formerly attributed to Aelbert Cuyp, has recently passed through several auctions and was given a careful conservation treatment, which revealed a genuine signature by Jacob Cuyp (fig. 5).²⁵ The painting has a peculiar history as it was recorded in a Paris auction in 1864 but by 1875 had been cut into two pendant portraits; they were rejoined in the twentieth century.²⁶ The work reveals a number of pentimenti. The girl's head was at some point changed from a near profile to the present three-quarters view. This change is undoubtedly by Jacob Cuyp, but recent retouching has

Fig. 4
JACOB CUYP (?),
Portrait of
Three Children
in a Landscape.
Oil on wood,
105.5 x 116.5 cm.
Private collection





left her face with a somewhat flattened appearance. In addition, like many of Jacob Cuyp's portraits of children, two large cows were originally positioned behind the figures, one which filled the sky over the ruins and another at the upper right. It is uncertain when the cattle were painted out, and these various changes make it difficult to identify the artist responsible for the landscape. The sky, ruins, and cattle in the distance are related to Aelbert Cuyp's work of the early 1650s, but they do not appear to have been entirely painted by him since the brushwork in the sky and ruins is more brittle and opaque than is typical of him.²⁷ Moreover, were the cattle painted out in the process of preparing the first version of the painting, that is, with Jacob Cuyp's full collaboration, or were they eliminated after his death in 1652? Both Jacob and Aelbert Cuyp often repeated motifs over the course of their careers, and their followers also freely borrowed these elements. The shepherd and cattle occur in

numerous other works, both by Aelbert Cuyp and his workshop. The ruined church, which resembles that at Egmond aan Zee, does not occur in any painting by Aelbert, but a similar view can be found in a drawing by a later follower of the artist (Lugt Collection, Fondation Custodia, Paris).²⁸ In sum, the portraits and animals of this painting are certainly by Jacob Cuyp, but it remains an open question whether his landscape collaborator was Aelbert or a member of his workshop. It is clear from the variations in the quality and handling of paint in works dating from the 1630s on that Jacob Cuyp had assistants who would participate in paintings and produce replicas of paintings. Aelbert Cuyp began as one of Jacob's workshop assistants and continued to collaborate with his father even after becoming an independent artist, and it is very likely that they shared a workshop or a set of assistants.

In any case, the painting demonstrates the variety of Jacob Cuyp's

Fig. 5
JACOB CUYP,
*Portrait of Two
Children in a
Landscape*, ca. 1650.
Oil on canvas,
98 x 125.7 cm.
Fergus Hall,
London (2008)



Fig. 6

JACOB CUYP,
*Sheep and a Goat in
a Barn*. Oil on wood,
37 x 52 cm.
Private collection,
United Kingdom

work in the later 1640s and early 1650s, especially his taste for exotic costumes which may have originated in Rembrandt's circle. The portrait of two children, considered together with the masterly portrait of the young Michiel Pompe van Meerdervoort of 1649 (Dordrechts Museum), can help identify a group of vigorously painted works by Jacob Cuyp, many of which were previously assigned to Aelbert. During this period, it is very likely that Jacob Cuyp created several other portraits of children (for example in the Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach, and formerly belonging to Stephen Reiss), as well as a painting of sheep and a goat in a barn (fig. 6, where two of the sheep are identical to those in fig. 5) – yet another genre of painting attempted by this versatile artist.

NOTES

- 1 *Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp (1594-1652)*, cat. Dordrechts Museum, 2002.
- 2 Although not signed, the painting was attributed to Jacob Cuyp by Alfons Nauw and Paul Smeets. I am grateful for the help provided by Rob Smeets, Milan. The somewhat flattened paint surface and the lack of Jacob Cuyp's signature make the attribution not entirely secure, but in my opinion that painting certainly records a composition by Jacob Cuyp, and it seems on balance to be by the artist.
- 3 William B. Jordan and Peter Cherry, *Spanish Still Life from Velázquez to Goya*, cat. National Gallery, London, 1995, pp. 81-83.
- 4 Signed, 'Jacob Marel fecit Anno in Francofurth 1637'. The artist divided his time between Frankfurt and Utrecht, where he married in 1641.

- 5 *Pride and Joy: Children's Portraits in the Netherlands, 1500-1700* (cat. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, and Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 2000-01), no. 42, repr.
- 6 Jan Baptist Bedaux, entry in Haarlem and Antwerp 2001, no. 42.
- 7 Bedaux suggested there is some doubt, as he can point to only one example of an identifiable portrait of a child in the guise of Cupid, a much later work by Gerard Hoet from the 1670s (Slot Zuylen). Bedaux adduces a single example of Cupid representing love between children and parents (Johan van Neck, *Richtsnoer des levens*, Hoorn, 1649, pp. 46-47; see Haarlem and Antwerp 2001, p. 184, note 4), which seems insufficient to refute a centuries-long tradition, dominant even in the northern Netherlands, of Cupid as representing the fleeting instability of erotic love.
- 8 See Dordrecht 2002, p. 65, fig. 69: *Kitchen Still Life*.
- 9 Dordrecht 2002, no. 6 (acquired by the Dordrechts Museum).
- 10 Dordrecht 2002, no. 18.
- 11 Fred Meijer, 'Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp als schilder van stillevens en dierstukken' in Dordrecht 2002, pp. 63-73. See Dordrecht 2002, nos. 5, 11, 21.
- 12 With the inscription, 'ne quid nimis' (not too much of anything), which warns against, one supposes, overindulgence in smoking and eating. Dordrecht 2002, p. 52, fig. 52.
- 13 'Een fanetassie: van J.G: Kuyp f 2'. John Loughman, 'Aert Teggers, a seventeenth-century Dordrecht collector', *Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991), pp. 532-37; Dordrecht 2002, p. 191.
- 14 Dordrecht 2002, p. 190. Jacob Cuyp painted Johan van Beverwijk's portrait in 1643; see Alan Chong, 'Catalogue raisonné: paintings' in Dordrecht 2002, no. 61; Dordrecht 2002, p. 15.
- 15 Chong 2002, no. 40.
- 16 Chong 2002, nos. 56, 57.
- 17 Chong 2002, no. 54 [figures by Jacob Cuyp, landscape by Aelbert Cuyp].
- 18 Dordrecht 2002, nos. 12, 13, 14.
- 19 Chong 2002, no. 47 [as Jacob Cuyp, possibly with the assistance of Aelbert Cuyp].
- 20 Walter Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2 vols. (New York, 2007), vol. 1, no. 35. The entry does not cite: A. Chong, 'Aelbert Cuyp and the meanings of landscape' (dissertation, New York University, 1992), pp. 486-87, no. C 114 [as perhaps by a pupil of Jacob Cuyp], and Chong 2002, p. 176 [as school of Jacob Cuyp].
- 21 Dordrecht 2002, no. 15 [as Jacob Cuyp]; Chong 2002, no. B3 [as uncertain attribution]. Mirjam Neumeister, *Holländische Gemälde im Stadel, 1500-1800*, vol. 1 (Petersberg, 2005), pp. 481-91.
- 22 Dordrecht 2002, no. 34. Chong 2002, no. 87.
- 23 Görel Cavalli-Björkman, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings 11: Dutch Paintings, c. 1600-c. 1800* (Stockholm, 2005), nos. 504, 505 [as attributed to Willem van Vliet]. Chong 2002, nos. 17, 18 [as Jacob Cuyp].
- 24 Dordrecht 2002, no. 25; Chong 2002, no. B1 [as uncertain].
- 25 Signed lower right: J.G. cuy [...] / A [...]. Under the boy: "AEtatis. 9". Under the girl: "AEtatis 7". Technical and conservation information and photographs were kindly provided by Fergus Hall.
- 26 Provenance: Malfait, Lille, sale: Paris, 19 Dec. 1864 (lot 7) single painting as Aelbert Cuyp. Auguiot sale: Paris, 1 March 1875 (lots 3 and 4, the portrait of a boy reportedly signed; the girl inscribed aged seven) as Aelbert Cuyp. Private collection, Ireland. Colnaghi, London (1991-92). Dorotheum, Vienna, 24 April 2007 (lot 223) as Aelbert Cuyp, unsold; Dorotheum, Vienna, 4 Oct. 2006 (lot 180) as Aelbert Cuyp, unsold; Sotheby's London, 10 July 2008 (lot 170) as attributed to Jacob Cuyp, unsold.
- 27 After examining the painting in March 1992, I stated that it was not by Aelbert Cuyp: Chong 1992, pp. 484-85, no. C 107. I later suggested that it was connected with Jacob Cuyp: Chong 2002, p. 186. The early sales are partially cited by Hofstede de Groot, nos. 132 and 152. Stephen Reiss (letter to Colnaghi, 1992) attributed the painting entirely to Aelbert. Fergus Hall (2008) believes that the landscape is by Aelbert Cuyp.
- 28 Inv. 3512. *Landschaptelingen van Hollandse meesters uit de xviiie eeuw* (cat. Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, Brussels et al. 1968-69), no. 31, fig. 101.
- 29 Also Niesewand sale, London (Foster), 9 June 1886 (lot 46). See Chong 2002, p. 186, no. B2 [as uncertain]. Also: Chong 1992, nos. c 106-c 113, although this is not a consistent group.

