

A remarkable signature of Theodoor van Thulden

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Introduction

In 1647 Amalia van Solms commissioned the decoration of the Oranjezaal, the central hall of the royal palace of Huis ten Bosch in The Hague (fig. 1). The death of her husband, stadholder Frederik Hendrik, earlier that year made her decide to dedicate the Oranjezaal to his memory. The decorative scheme therefore glorifies his life and deeds. Thirty-nine paintings were commissioned; thirty canvases hang on two levels on the walls, with a further nine on the ceiling and other wooden elements of the room. Painted between 1648 and 1652, they are the work of twelve well-known artists from the Northern and Southern Netherlands: Jacob van Campen, Pieter de Grebber, Salomon de Braij, Cesar van Everdingen, Pieter Soutman, Christiaan van Couwenbergh, Gerrit van Honthorst, Jan Lievens, Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, Jacob Jordaens, Gonzales Coques and Theodoor van Thulden. This mid-seventeenth-century ensemble has been the subject of a thorough study of the painting materials and techniques, ageing phenomena, the methods used to create a pictorial illusion, style and the relation between all these elements.¹ The study has yielded many important findings, to be published in a forthcoming book on the Oranjezaal.² A small but intriguing find is highlighted here: a remarkable signature on one of the paintings by Theodoor van Thulden. It suggests an interesting topic for further study.

Signatures in the Oranjezaal

Van Thulden painted six pictures for the ensemble, all of which are signed and dated (see table). Most painters signed their paintings, except those on the ceiling. Many also added a date of execution. The painters who did not leave their names are Van Campen, Coques and Willeboirts Bosschaert; Jordaens signed only one of his two paintings. Like Van Thulden, De Grebber, De Braij, Soutman, and Van Honthorst signed using their full names, whereas Lievens and Van Couwenbergh used monograms. Van Everdingen used both a monogram and a full signature.

The question arises whether the painters' practice in this matter is consistent with what is known from their works outside the Oranjezaal, or did they consider the Oranjezaal a commission that demanded special treatment, which might mean either the inclusion or omission of a signature, or a more elaborate presentation? To answer this, the oeuvre of the painters who contributed more than one work was studied. This provided some clues on how frequently the painters signed, but left open the question of why particular pictures were or were not signed.³

For most painters in the Oranjezaal the practice of signing seems to be in keeping with the rest of their oeuvre.⁴ For instance Jordaens did not sign all his work and Van Campen and Williboirts Bosschaert even less. The absence of signatures in these cases is therefore not unexpected. Even so, Willeboirts Bosschaert may have deviated from his standard procedure in the Oranjezaal. Only around fifteen percent of his known oeuvre now carries a signature. A third of his signed paintings were commissioned by stadholder Frederik Hendrik and another third by other members of the nobility.⁵ Though not all paintings made for the stadholder are signed, such an important commission as the Oranjezaal might have called for a signature. Van Honthorst is known to have signed many of his paintings and did so in the Oranjezaal. On the other hand, only half of the known oeuvre of Van Everdingen carries a signature, yet he signed all his canvases in the Oranjezaal. Van Thulden followed his usual practice when signing all his paintings in the Oranjezaal, as from c.1645 he had signed and dated nearly all his paintings.

It seems that the painters have used their normal signatures in the Oranjezaal, with the exception of Cesar Van Everdingen. All Van Everdingen's signed paintings carry his monogram, but in the *Birth of Frederik Hendrik* in the Oranjezaal he used his full name. Even here, he began with his monogram *CVE* and added *verdingen* later, using a slightly darker paint. The same may be true for Pieter de Grebber, who is known to have signed with his monogram, but uses his full name in the Oranjezaal. This calls for further study.



fig.1 The Oranjezaal in Huis ten Bosch Palace, The Hague

fig.2 Theodoor van Thulden, *Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command*, 1651,
oil on canvas, 321,5 x 758,5 cm, Oranjezaal, Huis ten Bosch Palace, The Hague

SIGNATURES OF THEODOOR VAN THULDEN IN THE ORANJEZAAL					
Part of the triumph with prisoners and the coat of arms of 's-Hertogenbosch and Breda (1st)	h 383,5 w 205	lower right corner	T. v. Tulden fec. An°. 1648		
The education of Frederik Hendrik (2nd)	h 311 w 197	book	T. v Tulden. fec. A° 1649		
The smithy of Vulcan (1st)	h 384 w 238	stone table	T.v.Thulden fec. 1649.		
Venus in the shop of Vulcan (1st)	h 384 w 238	shield	T.van Thulden fec A° 1650		
Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command (2nd)	h 321,5 w 758,5	lower left corner	T. van Thulden fec. A°. 1651.		
Part of the triumph with women scattering flowers and elephant (1st)	h 384,5 w 242,5	vase	T. van Thulden fec. A° 1651		

Table of paintings by Theodoor van Thulden in the Oranjezaal with picture size (height and width in cm) and location and tracings of the signatures. The paintings hang either on floor level (1st) or one level above (2nd). To see the pictures, visit the virtual tour on www.koninklijkhuis.nl.

Van Thulden's elaborate signatures in the Oranjezaal are characteristic of his work after c.1645.⁶ Nevertheless, some variations can be seen.

The signatures by Theodoor Van Thulden

Van Thulden signed his paintings in the Oranjezaal with brown paint on a depicted object like a book or a vase, or in the lower left or right corner. As can be seen in the table, his signature evolved during his work for the Oranjezaal. Two early pictures are signed Tulden, but from 1649 onwards he added the h. It is striking that the painter signed with Tulden, as in his oeuvre outside the Oranjezaal he always used Thulden. Tulden is, as far as is known, only found on engravings that were designed but not executed by the painter.⁷ Another development that is evident from the table is that Van Thulden abbreviated the preposition van in his name in the earlier paintings, but used it fully in the later three paintings. This long signature was already in use: it is for instance used to sign his *Perseus and Andromeda* dated 1646 (Nancy, Musée des Beaux Arts, inv. no. 853). Van Thulden varied the embellishments in his signatures, but it is clear from the table that the most adorned and most elaborate signature can be found on *Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command* (fig. 2).

The signature on this painting is remarkable, as Van Thulden made a line drawing of the signature on top of the paint layers with a pencil-like drawing material

before executing it in paint. The dark drawn lines are clearly visible because the painter did not follow them closely when he signed with a brown paint (figs. 3–4). The hard drawing material has in some areas scratched the paint, which was not yet quite dry.

To find out what material the painter used for the drawing, a sample was taken from a lacuna. In the paint cross-section, small lumps of a black material can be discerned on the surface (figs. 5–6). The cross-section confirms the observation that the paint was not fully dry when the line was drawn, as the drawing material can be seen pressed into the underlying paint layer. SEM–EDX analysis of the material suggests that the painter has used a black chalk. Although on the paint surface the lines seem to have a slight sheen, reminiscent of metal point, the absence of metals and the high carbon (C) content exclude the use of a metal stick. Further trace elements detected indicate an earthy material: silicon (Si), aluminum (Al), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), iron (Fe) and magnesium (Mg). The presence of these elements and the fact that the particles of the drawing material do not have a metallic sheen in cross-section exclude the use of a pure graphite pencil. Therefore it seems that the painter used another carbon-rich material from a geological source, generally referred to as black chalk.⁸ From the scratches in the paint it can be concluded that it must have been a relatively hard black chalk stick or pencil. Black chalk was a common drawing material in the seventeenth century.

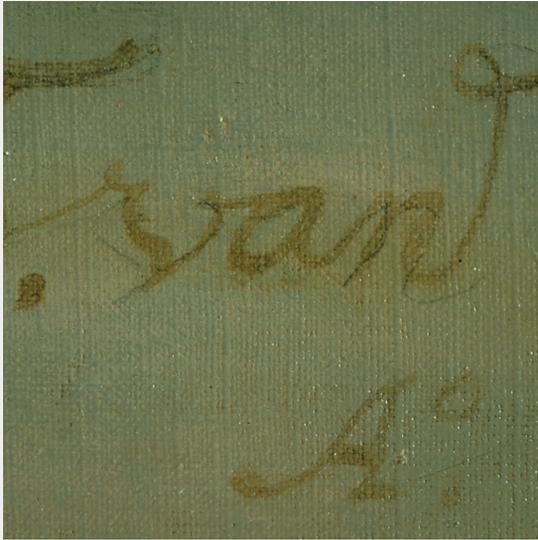


fig.3 Detail of the signature. The line drawing is visible under the signature in brown paint.



fig.4 Tracing of the signature both in paint and drawing material. Van Thulden applied a preliminary drawing for the name but not for the date. It is clear that the painter began by following the line drawing but deviated from it at *Thulden*. In doing so the signature became better oriented but smaller than initially planned.



fig.5 Cross-section from the drawn lines (original magnification 200x). The topmost layer consisting of dark particles corresponds to the line drawing.
 3. dark particles of the line drawing
 2. paint layers: leadwhite, charcoal black, ochres, brown, red and blue pigment
 1. ground layer: leadwhite and umber

fig.6 UV image of the cross-section in fig. 5

In the other paintings by Van Thulden in the Oranjezaal no preparatory line drawing has been found under the signatures. It is possible that in these cases the paint of the signature has fully covered the drawing, but even then the lines would probably shine through, as in *Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command*. It seems more likely that the signature on this painting is an exception.

The painting is the largest that Van Thulden made for this commission. It is hung in a high position in the Oranjezaal. From the instructions of Jacob van Campen, who coordinated the artists' work, Van Thulden knew at which height the painting was to be placed. The painter obviously took this into account when he chose to use a suitable painting technique, i.e. with less detail and many contours.⁹ Apparently, it also influenced the way Van Thulden signed the painting. Although in his other picture at this height, *The education of Frederik Hendrik*, the signature is no larger than in his pictures at ground level, for *Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command* the painter made the letters twice as big. It seems as though Van Thulden wanted to make sure that his signature could be discerned from floor level. He may have used the drawing to get the size right, and to test its visibility from a distance. Or, perhaps, the size of the signature made him doubt whether he could sign in free hand without faltering — not without reason, as the letters clearly became smaller when he no longer

followed the drawing (fig. 4). Either way, it seems that the presence of the drawing is related to the abnormal size of the signature.

Like Van Thulden, Gerrit van Honthorst also used an enlarged signature on his equally large painting placed opposite Van Thulden's. Of course, the smaller paintings that were hung in a high position could not carry a large signature, as the size of the signature would have been disproportionate to the canvas size. Only in these large paintings could the artists make sure that their signature was legible.

Conclusion

In his picture *Dutch maiden offering Frederik Hendrik the supreme command* in the Oranjezaal, Theodoor van Thulden has made a preliminary drawing for his signature with a black chalk stick or pencil on top of paint that was not completely dry. The drawing seems to have helped the painter to create a larger than usual signature, to make sure that viewers at floor level could read it.

The evidence presented in this article suggests that like Van Thulden, some painters considered it important to have a legible signature in the Oranjezaal: Van Honthorst enlarged his signature and Van Everdingen used his full name. This brings us back to the question raised before: did the painters in the Oranjezaal depart from their common practice in signing pictures, and if so, why? To find a definite answer, further study is needed. It would, for instance, be interesting to know whether Van Thulden and Van Honthorst used an enlarged signature on large and high-positioned paintings elsewhere and whether it was common practice to relate the size of the signature to the size of the canvas, irrespective of the distance to the viewer. Moreover it would be necessary to determine how many painters used an unusual signature in the Oranjezaal. If more painters are found to have departed from their routine, it would suggest that this commission was special to them.

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Photo credits

- 1 Limburg Conservation Institute (SRAI), Maastricht. Photo: Edwin Verweij.
- 2 Koninklijk Paleis Huis ten Bosch, Den Haag. Photo: Margareta Svensson, Amsterdam.

Notes

- 1 The paintings have been studied by M. van Eikema Hommes, Limburg Conservation Institute (SRAI), Maastricht, and L. Speleers, FOM Institute for Atomic and Molecular Physics (AMOLF), Amsterdam, for the project 'Comparative studies of the paintings in the Oranjezaal' (project leader A. van Grevenstein), which is project P1 in the De Meyerne Research Program of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The analytical work was supported by the FOM approved research programs 28 and 49 granted to Prof. Dr. J.J. Boon (FOM Institute AMOLF). The analytical research of the painting materials and degradation processes was carried out by A. van Loon, E. Ferreira and others, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. J.J. Boon. The research started under the NWO Molart Program when the Limburg Conservation Institute (SRAI) was conserving the paintings for the State Building Department (1998–2001).
 - 2 Edited by Rudi Ekkart of the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), The Hague.
 - 3 The question why and in which cases painters signed their paintings has hardly received attention in the literature. Jaap van der Veen studied the meaning of signatures in relation to the valuation of autograph paintings in the 17th century: J. van der Veen, 'By his own hand. The valuation of autograph paintings in the 17th century', in *A Corpus of Rembrandt paintings* (vol. IV), forthcoming. The *Revue de l'Art* published an issue devoted to signatures. The contributors describe various types of signatures but do not address these questions. Various authors, 'L'art de la signature', *Revue de l'Art*, 26 (1974), 8–56.
 - 4 It is difficult to establish when no monograph exists, as is the case for Pieter de Grebber and Salomon de Braij. Monographs used: J. Huisken and others, *Jacob van Campen: het klassieke ideaal in de Gouden Eeuw*, (Amsterdam, 1995); A. Heinrich, *Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (1613/14–1654): ein flämischer Nachfolger Van Dycks*, (Turnhout, 2003); R.-A. D'Hulst et al., *Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678)*, part 1, [exh. cat. Antwerp], (Brussels, 1993); R.-A. D'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens*, (Antwerp 1982); J. R. Judson, R. O. Ekkart, *Gerrit van Honthorst 1592–1656*, (Doornspijk, 1999) and verbal communication R.O. Ekkart; P. Huys Janssen, *César van Everdingen*, (Ghent, 2002); A. Roy, *Theodoor van Thulden: een zuidnederlandse barokschilder*, (Zwolle, 1991).
- We have to realise that all signatures may not have survived, due for instance to cropping of canvases or because painters signed on frames.
- 5 Of the last third the provenance is unknown.
 - 6 Van Thulden's monogram TVT has only been found on his earliest known paintings from 1630.
 - 7 It is known that some painters are not consistent in the way they spell their name.
 - 8 D. Bomford (ed.), *Art in the Making, Underdrawings in Renaissance paintings*, (London, 2002), 33–34.
 - 9 How the painters adjusted their technique according to the position of the paintings in the Oranjezaal will be discussed in the forthcoming publication.