

# TALES OF TRANSFORMATION

HENDRICK GOLTZIUS'S *ALLEGORY OF THE (ALCHEMICAL)  
ARTS* IN THE KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL

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## ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of secrecy played an important role in the early modern fashioning of painting as a specialized kind of knowledge about the visible and invisible worlds. This article explores Goltzius's use of secrecy in regard to his largest and perhaps most enigmatic composition, which is also his only painted work that includes a self-portrait. With its explicit references to the processes of alchemical transformation the work draws attention to the enigma of artistic creation and the mutability and versatility of Goltzius's art. The witty play with various attributes alludes to the multiple roles and guises an artist could assume, and the abundance of detail reflects on the mercurial power of painting as an art that links and connects the worlds of knowledge and deceit. The article argues for a dynamic and discursive notion of subject that challenges rather than satisfies the viewer's imagination and explores rather than asserts knowledges and ideas.

## KEYWORDS

Secrecy; alchemy; magic; colour; gold; knowledge; deceit; Mercury; Prometheus; Pandora.

Hidden knowledge, accessible only to a select few, is frequently alluded to in Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* of 1604, the first and most influential history of Netherlandish art.<sup>1</sup> In the preface to the first volume, the *Groundwork* (*Den Grondt der Edel vry Schilderconst*), a theory of painting written in verse, Van Mander compares his own endeavour with that of the ancient painters and sculptors Apelles, Antigonos, and Xenokrates who "uncovered and laid before the eyes of the young painters all hidden aspects of the art".<sup>2</sup> In the preface to the fifth volume, the *Interpretation of the Metamorphoses of Ovid* (*Wtlegghinghe op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidii Nasonis*), Van Mander argues that the ancient poets and philosophers concealed their wisdom and science "beneath cunning disguises", both to "seize the attention and whet the appetite of others" and to prevent "these precious pure jewels [from being] sullied and trampled by the filthy feet of rough, coarse, and careless folk".<sup>3</sup> The secrets discussed by Van Mander refer primarily to arcane knowledge about the workings of nature, the heavens, and art. And they are especially concerned with painting.<sup>4</sup>

The rhetoric of secrecy played an important role in the early modern fashioning of painting as a specialized kind of knowledge about the visible and invisible worlds. Mastery of movement and colour, thought to breathe life into a painted work, was vital in this respect: Gian Paolo Lomazzo, in his *Trattato dell'arte* of 1584,

## 1

On the importance of the rhetoric of secrecy as a strategy for forming communities of experts in the early modern period: Koen Vermeir and Dániel Margócsy (eds.), *States of Secrecy. An Introduction*, in: *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45, 2012, issue 2, 1–12; Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies*, trans. Albion W. Small, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 11, 1906, 441–498.

## 2

Here and in the following I quote from Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck waer in voor eerst de leerlustighe lueght den grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst in verscheyden deelen wort voorgedraghen. Daer nae in dry deelen t'leven der vermaerde doorluchtighe schilders des ouden, en nieuwen tyds. Eyntlyck d'wtlegghinghe op den Metamorphoseon Pub. Ovidii Nasonis. Oock daerbeneffens wtbeeldinghe der figuren. Alles dienstich en nut den schilders, constbeminers en dichters, oock allen staten van menschen*, Haarlem 1604, fol. \*4v: "hier in te volghen den verr'-voorhenen grooten en seer blinkenden Apelles, Antigonus, Xenocrates, en ander/onse oude voorganghers/ welcke (als ghehoort sal worden) in Boecken hebben vervaet/ en schriftlijck (nae hun wetenschap) alle de verborghentheden der Const/ den jonge Schilders voor oogen ghestelt/ en gheopenbaert." For the references to Pliny, see Jerome Jordan Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece. Sources and Documents*, 2nd rev. ed., Cambridge/New York 1990, 2–4.

## 3

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. \*3r (*Wtlegghinghe op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidii Nasonis*): "Waerom d'oude constighe Dichters/ en wijsgiere Mannen/ hun lieve (met veel arbeidt vercreghen) wetenschappen/ en wijze leeringen/ onder uytmuntinghe mom-cleedderen bemantelt/ en wech ghescholen hielden/ om anderen also oock greegh en smaacklustigh daer toe te maken. En dat sulcke costlijcke suyver Cleynoden niet souden van t'plomp/ rouw/ en achtloos volck slijckvoetigh vertreden/ en beveleckt worden."

## 4

"Verborghenthed" is used more or less interchangeably with "secreet" and "gheheymenisse" in the *Schilder-Boeck*. Cornelis Kiliaan, in his *Etymologicum teutonicae linguae sive dictionarium teutonico-latinum*, Antwerp 1599, translates "gheheym" as "secretus, familiaris", and "gheheymenisse" with "mysterium, arcanum". The addition of "ger." (for germanice or germanis) and "sax." (for saxonice or saxonibus) to "gheheym" indicates that the word was at that time used predominantly in regional dialects. Jan van Waesberghe, in the revised version of Elcie Edouard Leon Mellema's *Dictionnaire françois-flamen tres-ample et copieux*, Rotterdam 1599, translates "secretement, en secret" with "heymelijcken, secretelijcken, verborghentlijck".

describes motion (*moto*) as “the most difficult part to follow in the whole of art and also the most important and most necessary to know”.<sup>5</sup> “Knowledge of motion” is defined as “a divine gift”,<sup>6</sup> and the rendering of affects as being so difficult that it “can only be extracted from the hidden sources of natural philosophy”.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Van Mander presents the depiction of figures and affects as “secrets” of the painter’s art. Affects are counted among painters’ “very pretty secrets, enough of which come art’s way of their own accord”; they are acquired through inspiration rather than study.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Van Mander introduces a lost treatise written by the fourth-century painter and sculptor Euphranor as a “book on the secrets of colours”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Van Mander built his history of Netherlandish art around Jan van Eyck’s discovery of the “secret” of mixing paint with oil, a procedure that made colours appear “much more lifelike and gave them a brilliance of their own without needing to be varnished”.<sup>10</sup> This latter discovery made it possible for “our art” to “approximate, or be more like, nature in her forms”.<sup>11</sup> The invention of oil-based painting is thus situated by Van Mander explicitly within a culture of hidden knowledge and natural philosophy.

In his *Lives of the Netherlandish Painters*, Van Mander presents his friend Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) as someone “not inexperienced in the knowledge of nature, like a natural philosopher”, mak-

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Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura*, Milan 1584, 108: “[...] poiche questa parte e la più difficile à conseguire che sia in tutta l'arte; & anco la più importante, & più necessaria da sapersi.”

6

Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 108: “Ora la cognitione di questo moto, è quella come dissi poco sopra, che nell’arte è riputata tanto difficile, & stimata come un dono divino.”

7

Lomazzo, *Trattato*, 110: “[...] ancora che sia parte, tanto difficile, et che solamente si può cavare da i riposti fonti della Filosofia naturale.”

8

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 28v (*Den Grondt*, Chapter 6, “Wtbeeldinghe der Affecten”, stanza 71): “Want t’zijn [d’Affecten] seer bequame secreten/| Die ghenoech van selfs de Conste toevallen/| Soo dat goede Meesters (nae mijn vermeten)| Dese meer ghebruycken dan sy selfs weten.” Christine Göttler, *Imagination in the Chamber of Sleep*. Karel van Mander on Somnus and Morpheus, in: Christoph Lüthy, Claudia Swan, Paul J. J. M. Bakker, and Claus Zittel (eds.), *Image, Imagination, and Cognition. Medieval and Early Modern Theory and Practice* (Intersections, 55), Leiden 2018, 147–175, at 174.

9

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 52r (*Den Grondt*, Chapter 13, “Van der Verwen oorsprong”, stanza 24): “een eyghen Boeck der Verwe secreten.”

10

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 199v (*Nederlandsche en Hoogduytsche schilders*): “[...] dat d’Oly oock de verwen veel levender maecken/ en van selfs een blinckentheyt deden hebben/ sonder datmense verniste.” Throughout this essay, I have been using the very helpful translation by Jacqueline Pennial-Boer and Charles Ford, but occasionally modified it to make it closer to the original Dutch: Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters from the first edition of the Schilder-boeck (1603–1604)*, ed. by Hessel Miedema, vol. 1, Davaco 1994.

11

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 199v: “Dese edel inventie behoefde noch onse Const/ om de Nature in gedaenten nader comen/ oft ghelijcker te worden.”

ing him the true successor of Jan van Eyck.<sup>12</sup> Like Van Eyck, who kept his invention “a well-concealed secret”,<sup>13</sup> Goltzius was reluctant to reveal his working methods and techniques: “He does not show to anyone his unfinished works, although he shows them gladly to anyone who wishes to see them when they are completed.”<sup>14</sup> This article explores Goltzius’s use of secrecy in regard to his largest and perhaps also most enigmatic composition, signed and dated 1611 and now in the Kunstmuseum Basel [Fig. 1].<sup>15</sup> The painting has generally been construed as an allegory of vanity. It will here be presented as an allegory of painting or, more precisely, a painting that provoked debates about the mutability, versatility, and value of the visual and alchemical arts, debates that helped to create communities of individuals with shared interests and affinities for processes of making and creating. The painting’s large dimensions and performative aspects suggest that it was meant to engage rather than instruct the viewers, challenging their judgement and discernment.<sup>16</sup> With its explicit references to the processes of painterly and alchemical transformation, as in the motifs of an alchemist’s alembic and a painter’s palette in the lower right corner of the composition [Fig. 2], the painting seems to consciously engage with the image of Goltzius as a ‘protean’ artist, promoted by Van Mander

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Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 286v: “[...] in de kennis der Natuere/ als natuerlijck Philosophooph/ niet onervaren.”

13

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 202r: “En hoewel d’Italianen vast toesaghen/ met alderley opmerckinge/ en rieckende daer aen/ wel bevoelden een sterckachtighe roke/ die d’Olye met den verwen ghemengt van haer gaf/ soo bleef hun dit secreteet evenwel verborghen.”

14

Van Mander himself emphasizes that the secrecy Goltzius kept about his not yet finished works shows his similarity with the “excellent Michelangelo”: Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 285v: “[...] doch ick hebber geen begin af ghesien/ als ick wel behoorde/ om yet sekens daer van te schrijven: dan hy laet noode zijn dinghen onvolmaect yemant sien/ dan voldaeen zijnde geern yeghelijcken wie wil: in dat en anders ghelijckende den uytne-menden Michelangelo.” For Van Mander’s fashioning of Goltzius as the Dutch equivalent to Michelangelo: Walter S. Melion, Karel van Mander’s “Life of Goltzius”. Defining the Paradigm of Protean Virtuosity in Haarlem around 1600, in: *Studies in the History of Art* 27, 1989, 112–133.

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The most valuable analysis is by Lawrence W. Nichols, who also discusses previous literature on the painting: *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius, 1558–1617. A Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné*, Doornspijk 2013, 179–184, cat. A–55. It is a pleasure to thank Vera Keller for sharing with me her discussion of the painting in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: *Cornelis Drebbel (1572–1633). Fame and the Making of Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2008, 173–176. According to Keller, the painting represents “a process of judgment”, in which various arts – among them Alchemy (which she sees depicted in the female nude holding a small furnace) – are competing against each other for the attention of the still undecided prince. See also note 50, below.

16

Recent literature on early modern Netherlandish art has emphasized the performative and participatory functions of painting. Of particular importance in this context is Shira Brisman, Maerten van Heemskerck’s *Momus* and the Moment of Critique, in: *RES* 73/74, 2020 (forthcoming), which convincingly contextualizes Heemskerck’s painting within the 1561 Antwerp *Landjuweel*, a rhetorician’s competition on the topic of the (visual) arts. While Goltzius’s composition cannot be directly linked to a specific event, it certainly needs to be read within the context of Netherlandish traditions of rhetoric and debate. It is a pleasure to thank Shira Brisman for sharing her ideas about the two paintings as well as the manuscript of her article with me.



[Fig. 1]

Hendrick Goltzius, *Allegory of the arts*, 1611, oil on canvas, 181.0 × 256.8 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, inv. no. 252 © Kunstmuseum Basel.



[Fig. 2]

Detail of Fig. 1: An alchemist's alembic and a painter's palette © Kunstmuseum Basel.



and his contemporaries, but in a more complex and ambiguous fashion than previous scholarship has posited. As expert practitioners claiming for themselves true knowledge of nature and the means to ‘improve’ or ‘perfect’ it with their art, painters and alchemists have always entertained a fragile relationship.<sup>17</sup> Alchemy is a capacious notion for a whole range of knowledges and practices, ranging from the chemical production of pigments and perfumes to the fabrication of the philosophers’ stone, the discovery of the secret of how to make gold.<sup>18</sup> With respect to the art of painting, alchemy is most closely related to colour,<sup>19</sup> and it is indeed the transformative power of colour, as a means to breathe life into a painting, which will be the main focus of this article.

Goltzius himself referred to his ability to assimilate any style and technique in several of his artworks, most emphatically in the engraved series of the *Early Life of the Virgin*, in which he ‘recreated’ graphic and painterly styles of various Italian, German, and Netherlandish schools.<sup>20</sup> Cornelius Schonaeus, rector of the Latin school of Haarlem, compared Goltzius’s virtuoso skills as an engraver to the shape-shifting powers of Proteus and Vertumnus. Schonaeus was referring to Erasmus’s adage “Proteo mutabilior” (“More changeable than Proteus”), which alludes to the versatile nature of cunning and ingenious men who, like Proteus and Vertumnus, are able to metamorphosize themselves as circumstances dictate.<sup>21</sup> While the terms used by Erasmus, “vafer” (a cunning or ingenious person) and “versipellis” (*literally*, a skin-changer) are ambiguous in meaning, Schonaeus and Van Mander present Goltzius’s mimetic artistry as a positive force, situating it within an aesthetic rather than moral context. However, the many stories told by Van Mander about Goltzius’s clever disguises also emphasize the artist’s skills in dissimulation and deceit.

The Basel canvas is Goltzius’s only painted work that includes a self-portrait. In what follows it will be argued that the work may be understood as a monumental meditation on his exploration of paint-

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William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions. Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature*, Chicago 2004, 115–163.

18

Sven Dupré, The Value of Glass and the Translation of Artisanal Knowledge in Early Modern Antwerp, in: Christine Göttler, Bart Ramakers, and Joanna Woodall (eds.), *Trading Values in Early Modern Antwerp* (Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art, 64), Leiden 2014, 138–161, 141–142; Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, Chicago/London 2013.

19

Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World. Samuel van Hoogstraten’s Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, Amsterdam 2008, 220–223.

20

The six engravings were produced in 1593 and 1594: Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617). *Drawings, Prints and Paintings* (exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum), ed. by Huigen Leeftang and Ger Luijten, Zwolle 2003, 210–215, cat. 75.

21

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, *Adagiorum chilias secunda*, ed. by M. Szymański, Opera omnia ordinis secundi, tomus tertius, Amsterdam et al. 2005, 188–189 (Adagia II.ii.74): “[...] id est Proteo mutabilior, in vafrum et versipellem competit.”

ing and its transformative potential. Goltzius refers to hermetic and alchemical imagery to draw attention to the virtues and values of his own painterly work and to the protean-like metamorphic powers of his art.<sup>22</sup> While the painter's palette and brushes – the actual tools of his trade – are part of the realm of earthly riches, the artist himself appears among the learned men to the left, next to laurel-crowned Mercury, the messenger and interpreter of the gods and protector of merchants, rhetoricians, and, especially, of all artists and craftsmen. Mercury presents a scroll to a white-clad king, its words hidden from our view [Fig. 3]. The artist, meanwhile, holds an armillary sphere in his right hand, an object whose symbolic currency was rich in Goltzius's ambit. In Gabriel Rollenhagen's *Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum*, published in Cologne in 1611 (the same year that Goltzius completed the Basel painting), an armillary sphere denotes "ingenium" – the only virtue that transcends death.<sup>23</sup> An armillary sphere is also the traditional attribute of the "thrice greatest" Hermes, Hermes Trismegistus,<sup>24</sup> a mythical philosopher, priest, and king revered for his profound knowledge of the alchemical and mathematical arts. Associated with the god Hermes (Mercury), Hermes Trismegistus was believed to be the author of the *corpus hermeticum* and other revelatory writings. Paracelsus had already been celebrated as a new Hermes Trismegistus at the end of the sixteenth century,<sup>25</sup> and, in his 1561 poem *Delle cose del cielo*, the Florentine metallurgist Antonio Allegretti bestowed the epithet on Michelangelo as well, because he excelled in the three arts of sculpture, painting, and architecture.<sup>26</sup> While the caduceus, around which are entwined two, frequently winged, serpents, is the principal attribute of the god Hermes, and the armillary sphere that of Hermes Trismegistus, both the god and the savant are occasionally shown with the 'other' device [Fig. 4], the interchangeability of their attributes further demonstrating their close association. In addition, both

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Jennifer Rampling, A Secret Language. The Ripley Scrolls, in: *Art and Alchemy. The Mystery of Transformation* (exh. cat. Düsseldorf, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast), ed. by Sven Dupré, Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk, and Beat Wismer, Munich 2014, 38–45.

23

Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum*, Cologne 1611, emblem 1: "Vivitur ingenio, caetera mortis erunt." I would like to thank Alexander Marr for pointing out this example to me. For an excellent discussion of early modern definitions of the concept of ingenium: Alexander Marr et al., *Logodaedalus. Word Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe*, Pittsburgh, PA 2018, especially 19–51.

24

Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes. From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. by Joscelyn Godwin, Grand Rapids, MI 1995.

25

Carlos Gilly, Vom ägyptischen Hermes zum Trismegistus Germanus. Wandlungen des Hermetismus in der paracelsistischen und rosenkreuzerischen Literatur, in: Peter-André Alt and Volkhard Wels (eds.), *Konzepte des Hermetismus in der Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2010, 72–131, here 76–90.

26

Maurice Saß, "Un altro Mercurio [...] Trimegisto [...] e 'l mio buon Benvenuto". Antonio Allegretti Beschreibung von Michelangelo und Cellini als Kinder Saturns, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 58, 2016, 278–282.





[Fig. 3]

Detail of Fig. 1: Portrait of the artist with Mercury and other men © Kunstmuseum Basel.



[Fig. 4]  
 Adriaen Collaert after Maarten de Vos, *Mercury* (from the series of *The Seven Planets*), 1581, engraving, 31.2 × 21.9 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-1981-65 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

the armillary sphere and the caduceus were associated with the subtle element of air.<sup>27</sup>

The Basel painting relates to two other works containing Goltzius's self-portraits. In the 1594 engraving of the *Circumcision* from the *Early Life of the Virgin*, meant to evoke Dürer's most accomplished graphic style, the artist has portrayed himself among the bystanders in the background. In the large 'pen work' on canvas of 1606, most probably produced for the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, the artist shows himself with his burins standing at an altar-like forge where Cupid is tempering his arrows [Fig. 5].<sup>28</sup> Here, the engraver's tools draw attention to his sophisticated artistry of deception: Goltzius had used his pen rather than his burins to mimic the modes and effects of engraving. Van Mander could describe the latter work only from hearsay since it remained incomplete in 1604 – and Goltzius, mindful of his own (secret) process, was not about to let it be seen unfinished.<sup>29</sup>

## I. Mercury's Magic Wand

The earliest record of the Basel painting dates to 1764 when it was mentioned as being part of the collection of Allard Rudolph van Waay in Utrecht. It was described as "An especially large piece, depicting the Golden Venus and the banquet of the gods, with a large number of ornamental accessories ('by-work'), splendidly painted by Hendrick Goltzius, 1611."<sup>30</sup> The description is perceptive in that it emphasizes the Venus-like features of the female nude who turns her voluptuous body toward the viewer and whose pose echoes that of Michelangelo's *Dawn* in the Medici Chapel, of which Goltzius possessed a plaster cast.<sup>31</sup> 'Golden' is a common chromatic

<sup>27</sup>

Several contemporary depictions of the "children of the planet Mercury" include learned men with astrolabes. See, for example: Adriaen Collaert after Maarten de Vos, *Mercurius*, 1581 (from a series of *The Seven Planets*), engraving, 30 × 22 cm, London, The British Museum. The figure holding up the astrolabe is labelled "Doctrina".

<sup>28</sup>

Lawrence W. Nichols, *The "Pen Works" of Hendrick Goltzius*, Philadelphia 1991, 17–19, and passim; Walter S. Melion, Love and Artisanry in Hendrick Goltzius's Venus, Bacchus and Ceres of 1606, in: *Art History* 16, 1993, 60–94.

<sup>29</sup>

See note 14, above.

<sup>30</sup>

"Een extra Capitaal stuk, verbeeldende de Gouden Venus en de Maaltijd der Goden, met ongemeen veel bywerk, zeer heerlyk geschildert door Hendrik Goltzius 1611." Probable sale, Allaard Rudolph van Waay, Utrecht (Stouw), 27 November 1764 (Lugt 1351), lot 89. Quoted from Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 179.

<sup>31</sup>

Ibid., 34 and 334 (Appendix I, 1 October 1635).





[Fig. 5]

Hendrick Goltzius, *Bacchus, Venus, and Ceres*, 160[6]?, pen and brown ink on canvas, 219 × 163 cm. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. OR-18983 © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo: Vladimir Terebenin.

attribute of the goddess of love,<sup>32</sup> and along with reds and yellows – pigments most frequently used to render golden objects and appearances – it dominates the Basel painting. There is no documentary evidence on the painting's early whereabouts: however, its large size suggests that it was originally displayed in either a public or a princely environment.<sup>33</sup> It is tempting to hypothesize that Goltzius's largest painting, like his largest pen work, was originally intended for Emperor Rudolf II of Prague, renowned for his exceptional patronage of art and alchemy, his passion for collecting, expertise in goldsmithing, and love for hermetic and erotic subjects. However, in the absence of any written records, this must remain speculation.<sup>34</sup> Even if this were the case, the painting, dated 1611, might never have been sent to Prague anyway, since the emperor died in January 1612. But in Haarlem too, or any other major city in the Netherlands, the painting would have found an audience trained in reading and discussing complex allegorical and mythological references.<sup>35</sup>

As observed by Lawrence W. Nichols, the painting comments on or, rather, elaborates upon Goltzius's motto "Honour above gold" ("Eer boven golt"), a witty pun on his name, which he had developed in several contributions to *alba amicorum* from the turn of the century.<sup>36</sup> But Goltzius's emblem is here explicitly linked to the

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Kassandra Jackson, Father-Daughter Dynamics in the *Iliad*. The Role of Aphrodite in Defining Zeus's Regime, in: Amy C. Smith and Sadie Pickup (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, Leiden/Boston 2010, 151–166, at 162–163.

33

Nichols cautiously speculates that the Basel painting could be identical with the "stuck wercx van zyne conste" that the burgomasters of Haarlem commissioned from Goltzius on August 16, 1608: Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 182, 303–304.

34

The painting is mentioned neither in the extensive inventory of Rudolf II's collections drawn up by Daniel Fröschl from 1607 up to 1611, nor in the inventories of 1619 and 1621. Rotraud Bauer and Herbert Haupt, *Das Kunstkammerinventar Kaiser Rudolfs II., 1607–1611*, in: *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 72, 1976. – 1619: Jan Morávek, *Nově objevený inventář rudolfinských sbírek na Pražském hradě*, Prague 1937. ("Inventarium deren Sachen, welche vor König Fridrichs etc. unsers gnedigsten Herrn glücklichen Antretung ins Regiment der Cron Böhaimb in den Kunstkammern aufm Prager Schloss vorhanden gewesen"). – 1621: Heinrich Zimmermann, *Das Inventar der Prager Schatz- und Kunstkammer vom 6. Dezember 1621*, in: *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 25, 1905, XIII–LXXXVIII. The 1621 inventory mentions three pen works and one painting by Goltzius: XXXVIII, no. 857: "Cupido, Venus, Ceres und Bachus, mit der feder gerißten vom Goltio. (Orig.); XLIV, no. 1115: "Mercurius, mit der feder gerißten vom Goltio. (Orig.); XLIV, no. 1116: "Ein schöne große taffel, darauf Ceres, Venus und Bachus, mit der feder gerißten vom Henrich Goltio. (Orig.)." XLIV, no. 1134: "Christus, martyrisirt, mit zween engeln vom Goltio. (Orig.)." See also Nicolette Mout, Hendrick Goltzius und die Hofkultur Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1576–1612), in: *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617). Mythos, Macht und Menschlichkeit. Aus den Dessauer Beständen* (exh. cat. Dessau, Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie), ed. by Norbert Michels, Petersberg 2017, 54–61, at 55–56.

35

Literary associations such as chambers of rhetoric fostered a culture of mythological and allegorical invention. For Goltzius's involvement with the Haarlem chamber of rhetoric, "De Pellicanisten", see Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 34–35.

36

Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 182. The various versions are discussed in *ibid.*, 43–44. See also Larry Silver, Goltzius, Honor, and Gold, in: Tobias Frese and Annette Hoffmann (eds.), *Habitus. Norm und Transgression in Bild und Text*. Festgabe für Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, Berlin 2011, 315–330. Visual and literary puns on names, mottoes, and

artist's self-awareness and self-image as a painter, rather than a draughtsman. Compiled over several years by different hands and at various places, *alba amicorum* functioned as powerful media to forge, articulate, and assert subjective and social identities within larger communities of like-minded friends.<sup>37</sup> It is no coincidence that Goltzius's emblematic device is first documented in the 'golden year' of 1600 [Fig. 6] – the year when he “finally proceeded to brushes and oil paint” and increasingly began to favour painting over drawing.<sup>38</sup> By the turn of the century Goltzius had received golden chains of honour from both Wilhelm V, Duke of Bavaria, and Federico Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, and he was certainly aware of the fortunate conjunction of both material and symbolic riches that his skills in the graphic arts would generate. As for his paintings, even as early as 1603, when he had completed only a few small-format works, one fellow artist noted that they were “of such value that they may not be procured for any [amount of] gold”.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Goltzius was so closely associated with the auriferous that he was affectionately called a “golden friend” by fellow artists Van Mander and Cornelis Ketel.<sup>40</sup>

In Goltzius's drawings for the *alba* a caduceus serves as a ‘magic’ tool to connect ‘gold’ and ‘honour’ and convert material wealth into symbolic riches, money into distinction [Figs. 6 and 7]. While the realm of “gold” is represented by piles of coins, precious vessels, and, in one example, a money purse [Fig. 7], the realm of “honour” is depicted by the head of a winged cherub or cupid, called “spirit of praise” (*lof-geest*) by Van Mander. Yet in the *Schilder-Boeck* of 1604 Van Mander explicitly reads Goltzius's motto as proof of his disregard for material gain. Goltzius was less “greedy for

devices were common in the circle of poets, painters, scholars, and merchants around Goltzius's friend Van Mander, and appealed to an audience that embraced the emblematic culture of the day: Thijs Boukje, *De hoefslag van Pegasus. Een cultuurhistorisch onderzoek naar Den Nederduytschen Helicon* (1610), Hilversum 2004.

37

There is an ever-growing literature on *alba amicorum*. Relevant broader approaches include: Vera Keller, The ‘Lover’ and Early Modern Fandom, in: *Transformative Works and Culture*, no. 7, 2011, URL: <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/351/222> (date of last access April 10, 2019); eadem, Painted Friends. Political Interest and the Transformation of International Learned Sociability, in: Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (eds.), *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age. Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, Berlin/New York 2010, 675–704.

38

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 285v: “[...] soo dat hy eyndlijck tot den Pinceelen en Oly-verwe hem heeft begheven [...]”

39

Letter by Johann Tilmann to Count Simon VI of Lippe, June 7, 1603. Quoted from Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 67.

40

Ketel and Van Mander referred to Goltzius as their “golden friend” in two poems included in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* (Alkmaar 1610). The poems are printed and discussed in Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 31 and 274 (Cornelis Ketel, “Sieck-troostig klinck-dicht”), 276 (Karel van Mander, “De kerck der Deucht: aen Konst-rijcken, mijnen goeden vriendt, Mr. C. Ketel: Schilder V.G.”). For *Den Nederduytschen Helicon*, a collection of Dutch poetry to which twenty-two rhetoricians contributed: W. Vermeer, *Den Nederduytschen Helicon*, in: E. K. Grootes (ed.), *Haarlems Helicon. Literatuur en toneel te Haarlem rond 1800*, Haarlem 1993, 77–92; and Boukje, *De hoefslag van Pegasus*.





[Fig. 6]

Hendrick Goltzius, *Emblem of the artist*, 1600, drawing, 18.4 × 12.4 cm. Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, inv. no. 8076 © Albertina.



[Fig. 7]

Hendrick Goltzius, *Emblem of the artist with motto 'Eer boven Golt. ius'* from the *album amicorum* of Ernst Brinck, ca. 1607, drawing, ca. 15.3 × 10.1 cm. The Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, fol. 245 © National Library of the Netherlands.



money” (*gheltsuchtigh*) than he was “honour-loving” (*eerliefdigh*).<sup>41</sup> Van Mander also describes him as “not inexperienced in the knowledge of nature, being a natural philosopher”, a role in which Goltzius seems to have staged himself in the 1611 painting.<sup>42</sup>

All of the elements in Goltzius’s emblematic device – the coins, the gold- and silverware, the caduceus, the putti, and the heavenly light – are present in the Basel painting. But they need to be discovered and brought into new relationships with each other by viewers themselves. The object in the painting most obviously hidden (and thus also most easily discovered) is the caduceus or Mercury’s magic wand. It is depicted twice: A first caduceus is held and partially concealed by the laurel-crowned man in the bright red chlamys.<sup>43</sup> A second one, much smaller and with golden wings, can be made out below the putti blowing bubbles in the sky [Fig. 8]. Escaping in a cloud of smoke from a small alchemical furnace held by the Venus-like figure, this golden winged caduceus may be understood as a witty reference to Goltzius’s metamorphic self. In his influential *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) attributes to Mercury and those born under his planet’s influence a “swift and shape-changing flexibility”.<sup>44</sup> In the widespread alchemical theory of metals, purified mercury, described as ‘animated’ or ‘philosophical’, was thought to be an essential element for making the philosophers’ stone. Goltzius’s versatility in assimilating and absorbing other modes of artistic creation were, as we have already seen, compared by his contemporaries to the shape-shifting abilities of Proteus and Vertumnus.<sup>45</sup>

## II. Exploring the Subject

While Goltzius’s allegory undoubtedly includes self-reflexive elements, its precise subject seems to slip from our grasp. In their coedited volume, *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo argue for a notion of subject as a dynamic process, in which the viewers’ concerns, reasoning, sensi-

<sup>41</sup>

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 286r.

<sup>42</sup>

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 286v: “[...] in de kennis der Natuere/ als natuerlijck Philosophooph/ niet onervaren.”

<sup>43</sup>

For the chlamys: Liza Cleland, Glenys Davies, and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (eds.), *Greek and Roman Dress from A to Z*, London/New York 2011.

<sup>44</sup>

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and trans. by Jon Solomon, 2 vols. (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 46), Cambridge, MA/London 2011, vol. 1, 209.

<sup>45</sup>

Melion, Karel van Mander’s “Life of Goltzius”; Göttler, *Imagination in the Chamber of Sleep*, 147–176, especially 147–150.



[Fig. 8]

Detail of Fig. 1: Golden caduceus escaping from the furnace held by the female nude © Kunstmuseum Basel.

tivities, and imagination play a significant role.<sup>46</sup> With its self-portrait and its references to the processes of making and creating, the Basel painting is a particularly interesting example of a complex artwork that unsettles conventional modes of interpretation. Centring on two enthroned figures – an old, bearded, white-clad man and a young, nude, seductive woman – the composition suggests a hierarchical relationship between virtue and vice, truth and deceit. The world of science, wisdom, and understanding is set against the realm of vanity and ignorance. But there is also a curious doubling, reciprocity, and ambiguity between the two parts of the composition, a rhetorical strategy that also structures Goltzius's emblem. The white-clad king and the nude woman are each framed by two figures, the former by Mercury and Minerva, recognizable by her helmet and spear, and the latter by two female companions who both hold dolls in their hands. There are two disputing philosophers (next to Minerva), two putti blowing bubbles in the air (above the miniature furnace), and two *caducei*. The fiery opening in the sky and the flame-like headdress of the nude woman echo each other in colour and shape. The curious juxtaposition of a broken alembic and a palette prepared for use encapsulates the particular double structure of the painting [Fig. 2]. The palette holds the same pigments that had apparently been used to build up the layers of this very work of painting (white, ochres, yellows, red lake, and vermilion, as well as darker tones). From the broken glass alembic trickles a white powder, the useless and 'dead' remains, known as *caput mortuum* or "death's head", left over after the alchemical distillation; mercury purified through the distillation process, conversely, was considered as being endowed with life. As instruments of transformation, palette and alembic refer here to the ambiguous relationship between 'living' and 'dead' materials, the alchemy of painting and the alchemy of gold. But as in Goltzius's emblem, the realms of material wealth and of intellectual power are contrasted with one another, while also revealed to be inextricably linked: the caduceus joins the two different realms in all cases.

The iconography of some of the figures depicted poses a challenge to viewers today, as presumably at the time the painting was created: it is not fully comprehensible at first glance. Mercury is shown without his emblematic winged sandals, and he wears a laurel wreath instead of a winged cap, while Minerva's dress is adorned with images of the sun, moon, and stars. In addition, her open palm is inscribed with an eye [Fig. 9]. According to Van Mander, "an eye in the hand" refers to "prudence or foresight or considering before-

## 46

Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo, *Unresolved Images. An Introduction to Aporia as an Analytical Category in the Interpretation of Early Modern Art*, in: Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo (eds.), *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, Farnham, Surrey 2010, 1–15. See further: Koenraad Jonckheere, *The Timanthes Effect. Another Note on the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, in: *Netherlandish Culture of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Ethan Matt Kavalier and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, Turnhout 2017, 329–351; idem, Aertsen, Rubens and the *questye* in Early Modern Painting, in: *Lessons in Art. Art, Education, and Modes of Instruction since 1500*, ed. by Eric Jorink, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, and Bart Ramakers (Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art, 68), Leiden 2019, 72–99. See also note 16, above.



[Fig. 9]

Detail of Fig. 1: Minerva; her open palm is inscribed with an eye © Kunstmuseum Basel.

hand what one does”, an interpretation that will be further discussed below.<sup>47</sup> Goltzius reuses some of the motifs from his own series of the *Liberal Arts*, engraved by Cornelis Drebbel, Goltzius’s apprentice, collaborator, and brother-in-law, who shared his interests in alchemy and natural philosophy and who moved to the court of James I of England in 1604/1605.<sup>48</sup> The Latin couplets below the pictures, written by Cornelius Schonaeus, emphasize verbal, visual, and mental acuity, qualities that Goltzius also claimed for his own art. In the Basel painting, Mercury, the protector of the rhetorical and visual arts, assumes the appearance of Rhetoric, who in Goltzius’s print is represented with a caduceus and a laurel wreath [Fig. 10].<sup>49</sup> Learned Minerva is introduced in the guise of Astronomy, shown in the print holding an armillary sphere and wearing a necklace with pendants of the sun and the moon [Fig. 11]. The two disputing philosophers, meanwhile, exemplify a motif used by Goltzius and others in representations of Logic [Fig. 12].<sup>50</sup> By connecting and combining the iconographies of the seven planetary gods and the seven liberal arts, Goltzius aimed to create a highly unusual allegory of the painterly arts and their transformative power, in which the artist himself assumes a central role and which would have resonated within communities of art lovers and, most especially, lovers of Goltzius’s art.

The female nude on the right appears to be the male ruler’s seductive antagonist. Her regal headdress is possibly made of two birds of paradise with their spectacular tail feathers [Fig. 13].<sup>51</sup> Her crown and hairpin are adorned with pearls, and she also wears a necklace, bracelets, and earrings of pearls; a delicate veil is attached

47

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 132v: “Een ooghe in de handt [beteuykent] voorsichticheyt, oft te voeren bedencken t’gene men doet.” (*Van de Wtbeeldingen der Figuren, en hoe de oude Heydenen hun Goden hebben uytghebeeldt, en onderscheyden*, Book 2, Chapter “De Ooghen”): See Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 183.

48

*Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (exh. cat. Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums), ed. by Susan Dackerman, Cambridge, MA 2012, 386–389, cat. 98 (Jasper van Putten).

49

Schonaeus’s inscription reads: “Per me formatur facundae gratia linguae,| Etheri qua Dii, regesque ducesque moventur. – By me the grace of an eloquent tongue is formed, which moves the heavenly gods and kings and dukes.”

50

Schonaeus’s inscription reads: “Discerno a falso cauto discrimine verum,| Res dubiae per me docta ratione probantur. – I distinguish true from false by means of a careful distinction: Things that are doubtful are proved by means of learned reason.” Keller has pointed out that the meaning of the large spoon held by one of the philosophers is ambivalent: It could perhaps refer to a well-known philosophical debate about the potential deceptiveness of appearances (since a spoon appears bent in the water though it is not) or it might denote folly and waste (in: Cornelis Drebbel, 174). For the latter, see also Yona Pinson, *Folly and Vanity in Bruegel’s Dulle Griet*. Proverbial Metaphors and their Relationship to Bosch’s Imagery, in: *Studies in Iconography* 20, 1999, 185–213, at 190.

51

For a comparable headdress with bird of paradise feathers worn by the African magus in Peter Paul Rubens’s *Adoration of the Magi* of 1609/1628–29, see José Ramón Marcaida, Rubens and the Bird of Paradise. Painting Natural Knowledge in the Early Seventeenth Century, in: *Renaissance Studies* 28, 2014, 112–127.



[Fig. 10]  
Cornelis Jacobsz. Drebbel after Hendrick Goltzius, *Rhetoric*, between 1587 and 1605, engraving, 17.8 × 13.0 cm (plate). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-BI-7178 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





[Fig. 11]  
Cornelis Jacobsz. Drebbel after Hendrick Goltzius, *Astronomy*, between 1587 and 1605, engraving, 16.4 × 12.8 cm (plate). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-BI-7181 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



[Fig. 12]  
Cornelis Jacobsz. Drebbel after Hendrick Goltzius, *Logic* (or *Dialectic*), between 1587 and 1605, engraving, 17.8 × 13.0 cm (plate). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-BI-7177 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





[Fig. 13]

Detail of Fig. 1: Pandora and her companions © Kunstmuseum Basel.

to her hair. Her left hand lightly touches a branch with three pink roses; more roses are scattered on the steps leading to the throne of the king. The roses, pearl jewellery, and the nautilus cup, prominently displayed at her feet, associate her with the goddess Venus, who, for Goltzius, epitomized the allure of the art of painting.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in a lozenge-shaped composition created by Goltzius in 1610, Venus, recognizable by her pearl jewellery and her golden girdle adorned with a silver dove and a pink rose, is identified with *Pictura*.<sup>53</sup> In it she holds up a brush that has been dipped in red paint, a pigment that also dominates the Basel composition. In the early seventeenth century, roses, regarded as the most beautiful and the most fragile of all flowers, bore an almost unlimited number of meanings ranging from the religious to the mythological, moral, and scientific. In alchemical imagery, particularly illustrations of the so-called *Donum Dei*, a very popular alchemical treatise which considers alchemy to be a “gift of god”, white and red roses (for perfected silver and gold) symbolize the result of a successful alchemical transmutation.<sup>54</sup> Within the imagery of *vanitas*, they drew attention to the ephemerality of all worldly riches. As a pictorial motif, they must have challenged the viewer to create the appropriate meaning.

The Venus-like nude in the Basel painting is associated with vanity, lewdness, and deceit, as indicated by the sculpted grotesque figure decorating the armrest of her seat. The two women standing behind her throne, each with a doll (or lifeless body) in her hand, also partake of the imagery of vice [Fig. 13]. The younger woman, carrying a rattle and fool’s bauble or ‘marot’, might stand for mockery and ignorance;<sup>55</sup> the older woman, who seems to be using her doll to practice black magic, suggests malice. The two putti blowing bubbles allude to the transience of worldly life. The banquet in the background, which seems to be taking place in the heavenly realm

52

Eric Jan Sluijter, *Venus, Visus en Pictura*, in: Reindert Falkenburg, Jan Piet Filedt Kok, and Huigen Leeflang (eds.), *Goltzius-Studies. Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617)* (Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art, 42–43), Leiden 1991–1992, 337–396.

53

Hendrick Goltzius, *Venus as Pictura*, 1610, oil on lozenge-shaped oak panel, 69.1 × 69.9 cm. United States, Private Collection: Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 156–158, cat. A-42. The composition was included among the paintings presented by the States General to the then sixteen-year-old Henry, Prince of Wales, the heir apparent to the English throne, in late April or May of 1610.

54

Sven Limbeck, *Bild und Text in alchemischen Handschriften*, in: *Goldenes Wissen. Die Alchemie – Substanzen, Synthesen, Symbolik*, ed. by Petra Feuerstein-Herz and Stefan Laube, Wiesbaden 2014, 239–276, especially 246–255, cat. 24–25.

55

The fool’s bauble or ‘marot’ consists of a stick with a fool’s head on one end to which a sausage or an inflated bladder is attached: Werner Mezger, *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch. Studien zum Fortleben des Mittelalters in der europäischen Festkultur*, Konstanz 1989, 204–213, and passim. For related depictions of fools with baubles, see Hendrick Goltzius’s engraving of *Thalia* of 1592: Michels, Hendrick Goltzius, 171, cat. IV.7 (Doris Krystof); and the engraving of a jester by Jan Saenredam after Hendrick Goltzius of 1595–1600: Michels, Hendrick Goltzius, 311, cat. XIII.7 (Ilja Veldman). See also the two 1596 engravings depicting jesters by Jacob de Gheyn the Younger: Jan Piet Filedt Kok and Marjolein Leesberg, *The De Gheyn Family*, 2 vols., ed. by Ger Luijten (The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Engravings, 1450–1700), 2 vols., Rotterdam 2000, vol. 1, 240–242, cat. 159.

of the gods, may point to desires of the flesh. Goltzius engaged with, but also transgressed the imagery of vanity emerging at that time.<sup>56</sup> The material riches displayed in front of the nude woman's luxurious seat are rendered in almost palpable detail. They include attributes of worldly and ecclesiastical power such as an imperial crown and the sceptre – prominently displayed on the first step leading to the throne and surrounded by roses – a papal tiara with the crossed keys underneath, a bishop's mitre, and coins, as well as refined tableware and collectors' items that evoke the luxury commodities traded by sea: a tazza, a goblet with bossed decoration crowned with a figure of Mercury, a nautilus cup on which a putto standing on a turtle shoots an arrow at the sea god Neptune, and another cup adorned with a figure of Fortuna balancing on a sphere. There is a jewellery casket, from which a necklace of pearls is spilling out. The braided basket behind the tazza – a specific type of object that was collected in the Netherlands at that time – is a foreign curiosity.<sup>57</sup> There are also some books, and, next to the reclining figure seen from the back, a helmet, hammer, and trowel, a pair of scissors, a pair of shears, and what seems to be a weaver's shuttle.<sup>58</sup> The alembic and palette form part of this unique array of craft tools.

### III. Re-making Pandora

Peter Hecht has convincingly identified the subject of the Basel picture as Hermes (Mercury) presenting Pandora to Prometheus's brother Epimetheus. Epimetheus took Pandora as his wife despite Prometheus's warnings not to accept any of Zeus's (Jupiter's) gifts.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup>

Sophie Raux, *Lotteries, Art Market, and Visual Culture in the Low Countries, 15th–17th Centuries*, Leiden/Boston 2018, 288–306; Celeste Brusati, *Stilled Lives. Self-Portraiture and Self-Reflection in Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Still-Life Painting*, in: *Simiolus* 20, 1991, 168–182.

<sup>57</sup>

As Claudia Swan kindly informed me, the catalog of the collection of the Leiden pharmacist Christiaan Porret (1554–1627) lists several baskets: *Catalogus oft register vande sonderlingheden oft rariteyten ende wtgelesen sinnelickheden van indiaensche ende ander wttheemsche zeehorens/ schelpen [...] die Christiaen Porrett, wijlen apoteker/ in zijn cunstcamer vergadert had*, Leiden 1628, nos 275: “Een vreemden gebreyden Corf/ met eenen viercanten bodem” (“a foreign braided basket with a square base”); 288: “een gebreyde Mande/ uyt Indien/ van teenen” (“a braided basket from the Indies of wicker”); 637: “eenen Indiaenschen korf van teenen” (“an Indian basket of wicker”); 639: “Een Indiaensch korfken/ oft kabas/ van teenen” (“an Indian basket or kabas of wicker”). For a detailed discussion of Porret's collection, see Claudia Swan, *Rarities of these Lands. Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Dutch Republic*, Princeton 2021 (forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup>

The figure in the Basel painting is based on Goltzius's earlier studies of muscular male nude figures seen from the back which he developed from both classical and Michelangelesque models: Christine Göttler, *The Draftsman's Delight. Hendrick Goltzius's Journey to “His Desired Rome”*, in: *Crossing Parallels. Agostino Carracci and Hendrick Goltzius* (exh. cat. Zurich, Graphische Sammlung ETH), ed. by Susanne Pollack and Samuel Vitali, Petersberg 2020 (forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup>

Peter Hecht, Review. The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius 1558–1617. A Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné, by Lawrence W. Nichols, in: *The Burlington Magazine* 157, 2015, 105–106. For earlier attempts to identify the painting's subject: Nichols, *The Paintings of Hen-*

Hecht refers to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, according to which Zeus, in order to take revenge for Prometheus's theft of fire, commissioned Hephaestus (or Vulcan) to fashion from earth and water a woman of great beauty and allure who was then endowed with gifts from all the gods and hence named by Hermes (or Mercury) Pandora, the "all-gifted" or, alternatively, the "bringer of all gifts". The messenger of the gods who had furnished her with a mischievous and deceptive mind brought her to Epimetheus. But she opened the fateful vessel (*píthos*) given to her by Zeus, releasing all good things up to the heavens and all bad things into the world; only Hope remained in the jar.<sup>60</sup> Hecht's suggestion is astute, since the eye in the palm of Minerva's hand can now be read as a futile warning to Epimetheus, who acted impulsively, in contrast to Prometheus, who sought counsel. While the white-clad king, caught in a dispute between Mercury and Minerva, can now be identified as Epimetheus, his female counterpart represents none other than Pandora. Merging the imagery of Venus and *vanitas*, Goltzius construed her as a seductive nude, whose exotic headdress only increased her allure. Her companions reveal her (hidden) malignant and deceptive force, and the tools surrounding her point to the fact that she had been crafted, not born, an act recreated through the artifice of Goltzius's palette.

Hecht's identification of the mythological subject also opens up a range of questions concerning Goltzius's highly innovative treatment of the theme. What meaning would Pandora (as a crafted or manufactured artefact) have had for Goltzius and his contemporaries? And what about Pandora's jar (*píthos*) or 'box' (*pyxis*), as it was mistranslated into Latin? Does the furnace function here as that legendary object and, if so, does the golden caduceus escaping from it represent one of the virtues flying up into the sky? Finally, what about the identity of the other figures? Let us begin with the reclining male figure wearing an eye-catching hat and with a strikingly red face. The hammer and trowel next to him suggest that he is a maker and creator, perhaps the crafter of Pandora who formed her from earth mixed with water. Hesiod and most, but not all, subsequent writers credited Hephaestus (Vulcan) with the

drick Goltzius, 179–184, cat. A-55; and Paul H. Boerlin, Hendrick Goltzius, *Allegorie*, 1611, in: *Im Lichte Hollands. Holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts aus den Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein und aus Schweizer Besitz* (exh. cat. Basel, Kunstmuseum), ed. by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Zurich 1987, 122–123, cat. 35. Otto Hirschmann was the first to point out the alchemical allusions in the painting and the importance of mercury in alchemical thought (*Hendrick Goltzius als Maler 1600–1617*, The Hague 1916, 58–61). Building on Hirschmann's work, A. S. Miedema related the painting to the Haarlem chamber of rhetoric and suggested that it stages Goltzius's turning away from alchemy: Heyndrick Goltzius (1559–1617), en Trou moet blijcken, in: *Jaarboek Vereniging "Haerlem"*, 1941, 22–32, 1942, 115–116. According to A. S. Miedema the four figures at the left margin are portraits of Jacob Matham (Goltzius's stepson), Goltzius, Frederick de Vries (Goltzius's foster son), and Cornelis Drebbel (Goltzius's former apprentice and brother-in-law) while the ruler is a portrait of Goltzius's father Jan. So far it has not been possible to confirm any of the suggested identifications except the self-portrait of the artist. See also note 15, above.

60

Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. by M. L. West, Oxford 1988, 38–40 (*Works and Days*). For Hesiod's poems, see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, Berkeley 1985, 213–219; Dora and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box. The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol*, Princeton <sup>2</sup>1962, 3–8.



making of Pandora, but Vulcan is hardly ever shown with globe and dividers and in a reclining position. In addition, the words “Oceanus A[tlanticu]s”, inscribed on the globe on which the man rests his elbow, as well as the blue colour of the drapery on which he reclines, evoke a watery element that hardly goes together with Vulcan’s fiery nature.<sup>61</sup> Now, Oceanus is also the name of the god of the all-embracing waters, believed by the ancients to be the origin of all that has life as well as Prometheus’s most loyal friend, according to Natale Conti’s *Mythologiae*, the most important mythological treatise of the time. First published in 1561, the treatise was disseminated even further by Jean de Montlyard’s French translation of 1600, which was extensively used by Van Mander in his *Wtlegghingh*.<sup>62</sup>

There is reason to believe that the reclining figure is intended to represent Prometheus, who, having the power of foresight, attempted (in vain) to warn his brother not to accept Zeus’s gift. Prometheus’s theft of fire was the cause of Zeus’s wrath, which resulted in the making of Pandora. In the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Prometheus emerged as an exemplary figure of a wise and knowledgeable man, equipped with foresight and judgement and willing to suffer for the sake of his explorations of nature. Van Mander, in the *Wtlegghingh*, introduces Prometheus both as the “first discoverer (*vinder*) of fire and various arts” and as “maker of men”, who reputedly was the first to make “images or likenesses of men from potter’s earth” which he then animated with the heavenly fire Minerva helped him to steal. He taught men the uses of fire and language and instructed them in various arts including that of building houses, an art based on knowledge of geometry.<sup>63</sup>

Vulcan is also present in Goltzius’s painting, portrayed, I think, in the tall muscular figure at the left margin: he wears a short skirt, a tunic fastened over one shoulder and what seems to be a conical hat

## 61

I would like to thank Elizabeth McGrath for discussing the iconography of the reclining figure with me.

## 62

I have consulted: Natale Conti, *Mythologie, c’est à dire, explication des fables, contenant les généalogies des dieux, les cérémonies de leurs sacrifices, leur gestes, adventures, amours, et presque tous les préceptes de la philosophie naturelle et morale*, trans. by J[ean] d[e] M[ontlyard], Lyon 1600, 868: “Æschile dit qu’il [Ocean] fut fort bon ami de Prométhée”; 870: “Ce qu’ils dient qu’il [Ocean] fut si bon amy de Prométhée, c’est pource que ceux qui ont un voyage à faire sur mer, on besoing d’estre munis de singuliere sagesse et experience, non seulement pour parvenir où ils pretendent par la guide des Astres; mais principalement aussi pour remarquer et fuyr les escueils, à prevoir les orages et tempestes et les signes des vents; en somme pour eviter tout ce qui peult mettre en danger les navigateans” (Livre huitiesme, chapitre I, “De l’Ocean”). Generally on Conti’s *Mythologiae*: Natale Conti’s *Mythologiae*, trans. and annotated by John Mulryan and Steven Brown, 2 vols., Tempe, AZ 2006, vol. 1, xi–xlvj; Barbara Carman Garner, Francis Bacon, Natalis Comes and the Mythological Tradition, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33, 1970, 264–291.

## 63

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 2v (*Wtlegghingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidii Nasonis*): “Prometheus soude zijn gheweest/ die eerst t’vyer heeft gevonden en in’t ghebruyck ghebracht: oock veelderley Consten/ door middel des vyers/ sonder welck qualijck eenige Const gheoeffent can worden. Hy [...] leer dese huysen bouwen [...] Nu desen Prometheus, dat hy den Mensch-maker wort geheeten/ is nae t’getuyghnis van Lactantius, om dat hy is gheweest den eersten/ die beelden of gelijknissen der Menschen van poteerde heeft ghemaect. Dat Prometheus zijn aerden beeldt met t’Hemelvyer dede leven [...]”

(*pileus*).<sup>64</sup> But what exactly is the relationship between the two figures linked to each other by their distinctive headdresses and the colour of their garments? And what kindled Goltzius's interest in the two mythological makers and creators, one a titan, the other a god? In the painting, the figure of the artist is turned toward Vulcan. However, the armillary sphere, accentuating his knowledge of the heavens, underscores his similarity to Prometheus. The earthly globe and the dividers derive from depictions of Geometry, the liberal art that was frequently associated with the biblical creator God and, in Schonaeus's couplets that accompanied Drebbel's engraving after Goltzius's design of that art [Fig. 14], with "subtle disposition (*ingenium*)" and "sharpness of mind".<sup>65</sup> As an avid reader of Conti's *Mythologiae*, Van Mander was well aware of the affinities between Prometheus and Vulcan. Following Conti, Van Mander asserts that while some hold Vulcan "to be the first discoverer ('vinder') of fire and of all the things made or constructed by means of fire", others believe it was Prometheus who first discovered fire while Vulcan was "the first to be able to work metals into different shapes". Like Conti, Van Mander seems to support the distinction between the older Prometheus as the "discoverer of fire" and the younger Vulcan as the "inventor of the skills associated with fire".<sup>66</sup> The sky was the legendary source of this fire. In Goltzius's painting, the armillary sphere held by the artist, Mercury's caduceus, and the second caduceus escaping from the furnace are all directed towards the sky.

#### IV. Pleasure, Abundance, Excess

Dora and Erwin Panofsky pointed out that Pandora could signify both the negative effects of lust and a "treasure house" and "cornucopia" of good things.<sup>67</sup> The Pandora theme was popular in the

<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately, the object the tall male figure is holding in his right hand cannot be identified.

<sup>65</sup>

Schonaeus's inscription reads: "Terrarum tractus, et latas metior oras, Ingenio gaudens subtili, et acumine mentis. – I measure the expanses and broad shores of countries, rejoicing in possession of a subtle ingenium and sharpness of mind."

<sup>66</sup>

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 14v (*Wtleghinghen*): "Vulcanus wort van eenighe ghehouden te wesen vinder des vyers/ en van de dinghen die door t'vyer ghebouwt oft gemaectt worden [...] Nu wort van anderen den Vyer-vinder gehouden te wesen Prometheus, en Vulcanus den eersten te zijn/ die door middel des vyers alle harde metalen sulcke ghedaente con gheven als hy wilde/ en daerom was gheacht [...] te wesen den Godt des vyers/ en oock het vyer selve." Conti, *Mythologie*, 145: "Or ce tournoy, faict avec feu fut dédié à Vulcain, d'autant que quelques uns croioient qu'il fust inventeur du feu, et des arts et fabriques qui se forgent au moyen du feu [...] Or l'on ne tient pas pour chose bien assurée et hors de doute que Vulcain ait le premier trouvé le feu, puisque quelques-uns en attribuent l'invention à Prométhée [...] Cela peult estre le fit ainsi croire, parce que le feu estant par ce moyen divulgué, Vulcain le premier inventa les arts qui se font par le moyen du feu; lequel donnant telle forme qu'il vouloit à des metaux tres-durs, on pensa qu'il eust commandement sur le feu, et qu'il fust Dieu du feu [...]" (Livre second, chapitre VI, "De Vulcain").

<sup>67</sup>

Panofsky and Panofsky, *Pandora's Box*, 68–69.



[Fig. 14]  
Cornelis Jacobsz. Drebbel after Hendrick Goltzius, *Geometry*, between 1587 and 1605, engraving, 16.4 × 12.8 cm (plate). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-BI-7180 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Netherlands around 1600, not least because of Erasmus's use of the story to illustrate the adage "Malo accepto, stultus sapit" ("Trouble experienced makes a fool wise") in order to distinguish between those who seek advice before acting (such as Prometheus) and those who learn by making mistakes (such as Epimetheus).<sup>68</sup> The Pandora myth is also referred to in sixteenth-century emblem books. The *pictura* to the emblem "Non ex aspectu, sed ex effectu" ("Not from its appearance but its effect") in Matthäus Holtzwardt's Latin-German emblem book *Emblematum Tyrocinia* of 1581 shows Pandora opening her box; the *subscriptio* describes her as surpassing even Venus and the bright stars in brilliance [Fig. 15].<sup>69</sup> In Jean-Jacques Boissard's emblem book *Theatrum vitae humanae* (*Theatre of Human Life*, 1596) Pandora, the figure formed by Vulcan (*Mulciber*), represents the negative effects of lust (*voluptas*), the "root of all evil" (*radix malorum omnium*) and the "seductive companion of idolatry" (*comes blanda idolatriae*). Theodore de Bry's illustration shows Epimetheus reaching out to Pandora who holds an open "golden bowl" (*crater aureus*) from which evil spirits escape in a cloud of smoke [Fig. 16]. Deviating from Hesiod, Boissard argues that Hope, forced down by the weight of the vices, could finally release itself to escape and return to the heavens.<sup>70</sup> Francis Bacon, in his *De sapientia veterum* (*Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*) of 1609, points to the "common" interpretation of Pandora as signifying "pleasure and voluptuousness" which arises through the power of Vulcan's fire:

And it is a common, but apt, interpretation, by *Pandora* to be meant pleasure & voluptuousnes, which (when the ciuill life is pampered with too much Arte, and culture, and superfluitie) is ingendred, as it were, by the efficacy of fire, and therefore the worke of voluptuousnes is attributed vnto Vulcan, who also himselfe doth represent fire.<sup>71</sup>

68

*Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 31: *Adages IlI to Iv100*, trans. by Margaret Mann Phillips, annotated by R. A. B. Mynors, Toronto/London 1991, 78–80, adage 31. Goltzius might have also known a poem by Jacob van der Schuere in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* (Alkmaar 1610), which is addressed to Epimetheus, scolding him for having opened Pandora's box (135–136).

69

Matthäus Holtzwardt, *Emblematum Tyrocinia. Sive picta poesis Latinogermanica. Das ist eingblümete Zierwerck oder Gemälpoesy. Innhaltend allerhand Geheymnußlehren durch kunstfündige Gemäl angepracht und poetisch erkläret*, Straßburg 1581, emblem XXV: "Sum Dea Cyprigenamque aequans, speciosaque coeli | Sidera. – Mitt meiner schön ich überwind | Venerem und dazu ihr kind | Die liechten sternen auch dabey."

70

Jean Jacques Boissard, *Theatrum vitae humanae*, Frankfurt a. M. 1596, 61–62: "Addiderunt & huic figmento Spem iacuisse in fundo crateris, depressam a reliquis malis, quae cum celeriter evolassent, spes misera pondere defatigata non potuit se expedire ut foras prodiret: Na(m) Epimetheus horrore percussus, operculum vasi obdidit: spesque inclusa in coelum reportata est." Quoted from Michael Thimann, Boissards Pandora. Ein Nachtrag zu Dora und Erwin Panofsky, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 51, 2007/2009, 351–365, here 365.

71

Cited from Reid Barbour, Remarkable Ingratitude. Bacon, Prometheus, Democritus, in: *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 32, Winter 1992, 79–90, at 85–86. Barbour cites Arthur Gorges's 1619 English translation of *De sapientia veterum*.





[Fig. 15]

After Tobias Stimmer, *Pandora opening her vessel*, woodcut, in: Matthias Holtzwardt, *Emblematum Tyrocinia*, Strasburg 1581, emblem XXV: *Non ex aspectu, sed ex effectu*, fol. E1 recto. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/L.eleg.450i © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.



[Fig. 16]

Theodore de Bry, *Pandora et Prometheus*, in: Jean-Jacques Boissard, *Theatrum vitæ humanæ*, Metz/Frankfurt 1596, 59 (cap. XII). David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University © Courtesy of the Emblematica Online Digital Collection and David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

In certain alchemical treatises, meanwhile, Pandora is identified with the most noble gift of God (*donum dei*), the universal panacea and the philosophers' stone, the main and ubiquitous agent of transformation, mentioned above.<sup>72</sup> Occasioned by such writings, the Flemish Jesuit Martin del Rio, in his *Disquisitiones magicae* (*Investigations into Magic*), ridicules those who took "Pandora's vessel" (*Pandorae poculum*) for the philosophers' stone,<sup>73</sup> while the English playwright Ben Jonson, in his popular comedy *The Alchemist* of 1610, lists "Pandora's tub" among the many "riddles of the [philosophers'] stone".<sup>74</sup>

For Goltzius's construction of Pandora as a figure of painterly abundance and excess, Van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* must have provided an especially interesting source. Despite the fact that Pandora is not mentioned in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Van Mander gives her a prominent place in the *Wtlegghingh*, dedicating to her the second chapter of the first book, following the chapter on Prometheus. While Van Mander's points of reference are Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Hyginus,<sup>75</sup> his account is also indebted to Conti's *Mythologiae*, where Pandora is, however, not treated in a separate chapter. Enraged at Prometheus's theft of fire, Jupiter asked Vulcan to form a woman from "soft potter's earth" as revenge on humankind. After Vulcan's work had been given life, Minerva graced it with her clothes, Venus with her girdle, and Mercury with his mischievous habits and inclinations. In his interpretation of the myth, Van Mander leaves open the question of "whether the learned wise Greek with this fable would have wanted to indicate that the first woman was the cause of all misery" and also refers to some writers who

72

See, for example, Pandora, *Das ist/ Die Edleste Gab Gottes/ oder der Werde unnd Heilsamme Stein der Weisen/ mit welchem die alten Philosophi/ auch Theophrastus Paracelsus, die unvolkommene Metallen/ durch gewalt des Fewrs verbessert*, a highly successful compilation of alchemical treatises, fittingly attributed to one Franciscus Epimetheus. Based on a manuscript at that time owned by the Basel physician Theodor Zwinger (Basel University Library, Manuscripts, Ms. L IV 1, dated 1550), the compilation contains several widely known alchemical works, including a version of the *Donum Dei* treatise. It was first published by the physician Hieronymus Reusner in Basel in 1582, and then reprinted at least three times (in 1588, 1590, and 1598) before 1600. Wilhelm Kühnmann and Joachim Telle (eds.), *Der Frühparacelsismus*, 3 vols., Berlin 2013, vol. 1, 717–718. See also the compilation of treatises by the Paracelsist Benedictus Figulus, *Pandora magnalium naturalium aurea et benedicta. De benedicto lapidis philosoph[orum] mysterio*, Strassburg 1608; Joachim Telle, Benedictus Figulus. Zu Leben und Werk eines deutschen Paracelsisten, in: *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 22, 1987, 303–327.

73

Martinus Delrio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*, Mainz 1603, 50 (liber I, cap. V, quaestio I, sectio I: "Quid sit Alchimia & quando inventa?"): "Item qui Pandorae poculum hoc [lapidis materiam] esse contendunt, ab Hesiodo notatum: sed hi plures Epimetheos, sola spe reliqua, quam Prometheos, ex hoc grege fateantur oportet."

74

Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, act II, scene I.

75

C. Julius Hyginus, *The Myths of Hyginus*, ed. and trans. by Mary Grant (Humanistic Studies, 34), Lawrence, KS 1960, 142: "Prometheus, son of Iapetus, first fashioned men from clay. Later Vulcan, at Jove's command, made a woman's form from clay. Minerva gave it life, and the rest of the gods each gave some other gift. Because of this they named her Pandora. She was given in marriage to Prometheus's brother Epimetheus. Pyrrha was her daughter, and was said to be the first mortal born."

identify Pandora with Eve, thus bringing together ancient mythology and Christian history.<sup>76</sup> He then adds a “natural philosophical” interpretation, stating that “the creation of Pandora by Vulcan signifies the heat and the moderation of moisture, these making the year fruitful and abundant”.<sup>77</sup> In the mythological literature Vulcan was generally identified with life-giving warmth and understood as the foundation of the generative processes of both nature and the arts. Both Conti and Van Mander assert that “those who have fiery power within, and whose blood is finer and whose bodies are thinner than those of others, are exceedingly wise and strikingly intelligent”.<sup>78</sup> Conti, in particular, rejects any claims that Vulcan’s art should be understood as “alchemy”, which he considered a worthless craft.<sup>79</sup>

Van Mander further elaborates on the animation of Pandora through fire. The “clay image” of Pandora is introduced at the beginning of his discussion of “painting and colouring” in Chapter Twelve. The chapter starts with three comparisons between painting and drawing. Stanza One compares drawing to the body and painting to the spirit or soul of man, since “through colour the lifeless lines of drawing begin to stir and come alive”.<sup>80</sup> Stanza Two likens drawing to “the clay image of Prometheus, not unpleasant to Minerva, the goddess of the arts”, and painting to the “heavenly fire he [Prometheus] stole to his own ruin to add movement to his work;

76

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 3v (*Wtlegghingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidii Nasonis*): “Of nu de gheleerde wijze Grieken met dese Fabel hebben willen duyden/ dat d’eerste Vrouwe de oorsaekster is gheweest van alle des Menschen ellendicheyt/ dat laet ick blijven by datter van te ghevoelen is: Niet begeerende/ oft voor hebbende/ onder een te mengen d’heyliche suyver Schrift met de ghemeyne oft Heydensche versieringen.”

77

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 3v (*Wtlegghingh*): “[Marginal note:] Natuerlijc uytleggh op Pandora.) Maer ick segghe/ Vulcanus maeckte Pandora, dat is/ de hitte en de ghetempertheit der locht/ die maken het Jaer vruchtbaer en overvloedich.” See Conti, *Mythologie*, 315: “Vulcain forma Pandore, d’autant que la chaleur et moderation de l’air (qui, comme dit Theophraste, és causes des plantes, fait plus de besongne que tout le travail et industrie des hommes en general) rendent l’année fertile et de bon rapport” (*Livre quatriesme, chapitre VI: “De Promethée”*).

78

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 15v (*Wtlegghingh*): “[...] en dat om dieswille dat de ghene/ die in sich hebben een vyrighe cracht/ suyver van bloedt/ en ranck van lichaem zijn/ hebben ghemeenlijck tot alle Const-vindinge en oeffeningen eenen levenden snellen geest/ en bequame goede herssenen.” Conti, *Mythologie*, 153: “[...] parce que ceux qui ont une force ignée, le sang subtil, et le corps mince et delié, ont ordinairement de l’esprit et la cervelle bien faicte” (*Livre second, chapitre VI: “De Vulcain”*).

79

Conti, *Mythologie*, 154–156: “[Marginal note:] Invective contre les chemistes.” For Conti’s attack against the alchemists: John Mulryan and Steven Brown, Natale Conti and the Alchemists. The Wedding of Myth and Science in the Renaissance, in: *Cauda Pavonis*, n.s. 9, 1990, issue 2, 1–3. On Van Mander’s distinction between the “art-loving” minds of the painters from the “gold-seeking” ones of the alchemists: Christine Göttler, Vulcan’s Forge. The Sphere of Art in Early Modern Antwerp, in: Sven Dupré and Christine Göttler (eds.), *Knowledge and Discernment in the Early Modern Arts*, New York 2017, 52–87, here 67–70.

80

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 46v (“Van wel schilderen, oft Coloreren”, stanza 1): “Indien het teyckenen by den Lichame | Te ghelijcken is/ in manier van spreken/ Met zijn verscheyden leden ten betame/ | Soo en sal t’schilderen niet onbequame | By den Gheest oft de Siele zijn gheleken: | Want door verwen worden de doode streken | Der teyckeninghen te roeren en leven/ | En de rechte verweckinghe ghegheven.”



it thus quickly became a Pandora, that is to say the excess of all good things”.<sup>81</sup> Stanza Three, finally, compares drawing to the sound of a musical instrument and painting to that of the human voice. In Stanza Two, Van Mander implicitly conflates Vulcan (the maker of Pandora) and Prometheus (the first maker of men whom he animated with the stolen heavenly fire), further allegorizing painting as overabundance – the ambiguous quality associated with Pandora. “Overschot” and “overvloed” – the terms used by Van Mander in *Den Grondt* and the *Wtlegghingh* in connection with Pandora – cover a wide semantic field ranging from fecundity, fertility, and abundance to intemperance and excess.<sup>82</sup> Goltzius certainly knew Van Mander’s chapter on painting and colouring and his use of the Pandora myth to reflect on the affinities between colour, fire, movement, and life. Indeed, the painting’s multiple meanings converge in the animating and transformative power of colour, as prominently evidenced by the motif of the palette in the front area of the composition.

## V. Secrecy, Rivalry, and Wit

Goltzius’s inventive use of the caduceus in both his emblem and several of his paintings (including the one in Basel) further confirms the central importance of quick-witted Mercury for the fashioning and self-fashioning of his artistic persona. In his life-size painting of *Mercury* of 1611 Goltzius represents the god as a painter with palette and brushes, while his winged caduceus might also serve as a maulstick to steady his hand [Fig. 17]. It was certainly no coincidence that Goltzius included the figure of Mercury in his *Danaë* of 1603, a work praised by Van Mander for the flesh tones and the “glowing face” of the old woman [Fig. 18].<sup>83</sup> The painting plays on the imagery of Goltzius’s motto and also makes evident the affinities between red (or vermilion) and gold, that is to say, between the painter’s and the alchemist’s materials.

The vibrant red-orange colour of the chlamys with its iridescent golden reflections, the deep red hues of the fabric draped over the nude woman’s seat, and the reddish reflections in the metallic

81

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 46v (“Van wel schilderen/ oft Coloreren”, stanza 2): “Jae het teyckenen is als t’aerdsche beelde | Van Prometheus, het welcke Minerven | Godinne der Consten niet en verveelde/ | T’schilderen als t’Hemel-vyer/ dat hy steelde/ | En daer hy mede/ tot zijns selfs verderven/ | Zijn werck beweginghe dede verwerven/ | En werdte also een Pandora met spoede/ | Te weten/ t’overschot van allen goede.”

82

Kiliaan, *Etymologicum*, translates “overvloed” as “abundantia, affluentia, redundantia, superfluitas, hubertas, copia, luxus, luxuria”.

83

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 286r: “gloeyende tronie.” Paul Taylor, *The Glow in Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Dutch Paintings*, in: Erma Hermens in collaboration with Annemiek Ouwerkerk and Nicola Costaras (eds.), *Looking through Paintings. The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research* (Leids kunsthistorisch jaarboek, 11), Baarn/London 1998, 159–175.



[Fig. 17]

Hendrick Goltzius, *Mercury*, 1611, oil on canvas, 214 × 120 cm. The Hague, Mauritshuis, on long-term loan in Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum, inv. no. 44 © Frans Hals Museum, on long-term loan from the Mauritshuis. Photo: René Gerritsen.



[Fig. 18]  
Hendrick Goltzius, *The Sleeping Danaë*, 1603, oil on canvas,  
173.3 × 200 cm. Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of  
Art, inv. no. M.84.191 © Museum Associates/LACMA, Los Angeles.



objects suggest the use of a broad variety of reds, including vermilion or mercuric sulphide (HgS), one of the oldest artificially or alchemically made artists' pigments. Vermilion was traditionally prepared by the combination and subsequent sublimation of mercury and sulphur.<sup>84</sup> In the chapter "on painting and colouring" in *Den Grondt*, Van Mander expressly recommends the use of vermilion as the pigment that "makes all the flesh parts glow".<sup>85</sup> Antwerp was renowned for its production of high-quality vermilion in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and Amsterdam eventually developed a highly successful market for the pigment as well.<sup>86</sup> Vermilion was available in various shades and was frequently used by Netherlandish painters including Van Eyck, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Rubens, and Rembrandt.<sup>87</sup> Goltzius was certainly aware of the fact that mercury and sulphur – the primary components in the manufacture of vermilion – were also the main elements or, rather, 'principles' that were thought to generate gold through either the natural heat of the earth or the heat of the alchemical furnace.

A series of notarial acts kept in Haarlem suggests that Goltzius was involved in the practice of gold-making in around 1605, having allegedly been introduced to it by a certain Leonard Engelbrecht who lodged in his house at some point before August 20, 1605.<sup>88</sup> Under the date June 1605, the Utrecht humanist Aernout van Buchell (Arnoldus Buchelius) recorded in the so-called *Res Pictoriae* that Bartholomeus Ferreris, a renowned collector of art in Leiden, had told him about a "chemical mishap" that had befallen Goltzius. The latter expected some "marvels from a glass vessel, which he had held for some time in the fire; but it burst when he brought his

## 84

On the production of vermilion, see: Rutherford J. Gettens, Robert L. Feller, and W. T. Chase, Vermilion and Cinnabar, in: Ashok Roy (ed.), *Artists' Pigments. A Handbook of their History and Characteristics*, 4 vols., Washington 1993; repr. 2012, vol. 2, 159–182; Spike Bucklow, *Red. The Art and Science of a Colour*, London 2016, 70–77; Pamela H. Smith, Vermilion, Mercury, Blood, and Lizards. Matter and Meaning in Metalworking, in: Ursula Klein and Emma C. Spary (eds.), *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe. Between Market and Laboratory*, Chicago 2010, 29–49. See also the inspiring discussion by Anne Dunlop, Drawing Blood, in: *RES* 63–64, 2013, 70–79, esp. 77–78.

## 85

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fols. 48v–49r (Den Grondt, Chapter 12: "Van wel schilderen, oft Coloreren", stanzas 29 and 30), at fol. 49r: "Maer vermillioen doet al vleeschigher gloeyen."

## 86

Filip Vermeylen, The Colour of Money. Dealing in Pigments in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp, in: Jo Kirby, Susie Nash, and Joanna Cannon (eds.), *Trade in Artists' Materials. Markets and Commerce in Europe to 1700*, London 2010, 356–365. For the good quality of Dutch vermilion: Jo Kirby, The Painter's Trade in the Seventeenth Century. Theory and Practice, in: *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 20, 1999, 5–49, at 31.

## 87

See the list of examples in Gettens, Feller, and Chase, Vermilion and Cinnabar, 174–178.

## 88

The documents date from August 1605 to August 1608. For a detailed account of the dispute that turned into a legal case: Nichols, The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius, 41–43 and 295–303 (Appendix I).

face closer to see more clearly, and he almost lost an eye”.<sup>89</sup> While Goltzius’s interest in transmutational alchemy provoked the scorn of some of his contemporaries, alchemical analogies and metaphors were used to praise the mutability of his skills in the arts. In the chapter of *Den Grondt* on the art of depicting reflections, Van Mander calls Goltzius, who after years of drawing and engraving had finally taken to painting, “the only phoenix with golden feathers”, implicitly comparing his conversion to the art of painting with an alchemical transmutation: the resurrected phoenix was frequently used as a symbol for the philosophers’ stone.<sup>90</sup> In a eulogy published on the occasion of his death in 1617, Goltzius is described as “an investigator of the philosophers’ stone” who was more highly esteemed than many alchemists.<sup>91</sup>

In conclusion we might return to the 1764 description of the painting and its “large number of ornamental accessories” (“ongemeen veel bywerk”). Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Goltzius’s Basel painting is its ambition to show the artist’s mastery of almost all types of painting: large figures, nudes, affects, and the rendering of reflections in metallic surfaces. Goltzius completed the painting in 1611, just at the time when Peter Paul Rubens, sixteen years his junior, was being celebrated in Antwerp for his virtuoso skills in the depiction of large histories and nudes. After he had turned to painting around 1600 Goltzius began to closely observe Rubens’s compositions, figural inventions, and explorations of colour and paint. With the Basel painting Goltzius might have aimed to emulate the younger Antwerp artist and perhaps even surpass him in the rendering of what Van Mander himself termed “by werck”<sup>92</sup>

## 89

The *Res Pictoriae* are a bundle of handwritten notes on art, kept at the Utrecht University Library: “Narrabat idem Goltzii infortunium chymicum nam mira quaedam sibi persuaderet de vitro quem in igne habuerat aliquamdiu atque contemplandi gratia propius adhiberet vultum eo disrupto paene alterum oculum perdidit.” Latin text quoted from Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 294–295.

## 90

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 33r (*Den Grondt*, Chapter 7, “Van de Reflecty”, stanza 47): “D’ander heeft Natuer gants willen aenwennen | Linearis en Clypeus practijcken/| Eyndlijck oock Picturams, end’ hem doen kennen | Voor eenighen Phoenix met goltsche pennen.” For the alchemist Michael Maier’s poem on the “resurrected phoenix” (*Cantilenaes intellectuales* [...] de Phoenixe redivivo, 1622): Didier Kahn, *Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis. Part I – Preliminary Survey*, in: *Ambix* 57, 2010, 249–274, here 273–274.

## 91

*Elegia Ofte Klagh-Dichtse Twee-Spraeck, Over de Doot des Alder-konst-rijksten Heer Henricus Goltzius*, Haarlem 1617, fol. A4r; quoted from Nichols, *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius*, 311–316, here 315 (fol. Aiv r–v): “Een ondersoecker der Philosophalen Steen. Wiert hy bevonden oock boven veel Alchmisten,| Met Spraken dry begaeft [...]” The “three languages” with which Goltzius was gifted refer to drawing, engraving, and painting, termed “Linearis”, “Clypeus”, and “Pictura” by Van Mander in the passage cited above (note 90). Goltzius is thus implicitly compared to Michelangelo, renowned for his command of the three artistic languages of sculpture, painting, and architecture. See note 14, above.

## 92

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 83r.

or “by-een-voeginge”<sup>93</sup> – the lifelike rendering of inanimate things – a part of painting Rubens generally left to his collaborators.

As I hope to have shown in this article, it would be inaccurate to read Goltzius’s Basel painting as either a simple allegory of virtue and vice, or an allegory of alchemy. Instead, the painting raises a series of questions: Authors from Quintilian and Isidore of Seville to Lorenzo Valla wrote of the clouded, concealed, hidden, veiled, and wrapped aspects of the *aenigma*, or riddle that presents obscure questions and hints at their solution through images.<sup>94</sup> In Renaissance literary theory, an *aenigma* was defined variously as “knotty or veiled speech”,<sup>95</sup> or as a dynamic discourse that is more obscure than an allegory, and needs to be “guessed rather than interpreted”.<sup>96</sup> If Van Mander had still been alive in 1611 he would most probably have described the Basel painting as “knotty” and laden with “keen-witted meanings”, terms he used to discuss Cornelis Ketel’s “sinnekens” or allegorical works.<sup>97</sup> The Basel painting emphatically shows that it conceals. Its subject is both the enigma of artistic creation and the secret of Goltzius’s art. The riddle posed by its maker challenges viewers to look very closely, and to engage in a process of trial and error in an attempt to untie the knot. In his witty play with various attributes – the armillary sphere, caduceus, globe, palette, and alembic – Goltzius alluded to the multiple roles and guises (as philosopher, rhetorician, and alchemist) an artist could assume. The luxurious abundance of detail invested in the depiction of the realm of Pandora invites the viewer to reflect on the mercurial power of painting as an art that links and connects the worlds of knowledge and deceit. Goltzius articulated his protean and mercurial identities as well as his promethean ambitions, recommending himself as the new Hermes Trismegistus, a ‘second maker’ of Pandora who, with his palette, brought to life the work of the blacksmith Vulcan.

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<sup>93</sup>

Ibid., fol. 121r.

<sup>94</sup>

Kateljijne Schiltz, *Music and Riddle Culture in the Renaissance*, New York 2015, 22–64.

<sup>95</sup>

Pietro Cerone: “Aenigma est sermo nodosus, & involutus.” Quoted from Schiltz, *Music and Riddle Culture*, 209.

<sup>96</sup>

Lorenzo Valla: “Aenigma est allegoria obscurior, quam diviniare magis quam interpretari oporteat.” Quoted from Schiltz, *Music and Riddle Culture*, 51, 209.

<sup>97</sup>

Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fols. 276r–277v.

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