Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, *Study of a Boy’s Head*

Carina Fryklund
Curator, Old Master Drawings and Paintings
Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, is published with generous support from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum.

Nationalmuseum collaborates with Svenska Dagbladet and Grand Hôtel Stockholm. We would also like to thank FCB Fältman & Malmén.

Cover Illustration

Publisher
Berndt Arell, Director General

Editor
Janna Herder

Editorial Committee
Janna Herder, Linda Hinners, Merit Laine, Lena Munther, Magnus Olausson, Martin Olin, Maria Perers and Lidia Westerberg Olofsson

Photographs
Nationalmuseum Photographic Studio/
Linn Ahlgren, Bodil Beckman, Erik Cornelius, Anna Danielsson, Cecilia Heisser, Per-Åke Persson and Hans Thorwid

Picture Editor
Rikard Nordström

Photo Credits
© Samlungen der Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (Fig. 5, p. 15)
© Museum Breduis The Hague (Fig. 6, p. 16)
© The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo/Jacques Latham (Fig. 2, p. 23)
© Kalmar läns museum, Kalmar/Rolf Lind (Fig. 3, p. 27)
© Stockholms Auktionsverk, Stockholm (Fig. 5, p. 35)
© Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels (Fig. 2, p. 38)
© Teylers Museum, Haarlem (Fig. 3, p. 39)
© Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Shellmark: Riserva S.81 (int.2) (Fig. 2, p. 42)
© Galerie Tarantino, Paris (Figs. 3–4, p. 43)
© Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain (Figs. 3–4, pp. 46–47)
© National Library of Sweden, Stockholm (Figs. 5–6, pp. 48–49)
© Uppsala Auktionskammare, Uppsala (Fig. 1, p. 51)
© Landsarkivet, Gothenburg/Johan Pihlgren (Fig. 3, p. 55)
© Västergötlands museum, Skara (Fig. 4, p. 55)
© Svensk Form Design Archive/Centre for Business History (Fig. 2, p. 38)
© Svenskt Tenn Archive and Collection, Stockholm (Fig. 4, p. 60)
© Denise Grünstein (Fig. 5, p. 152)
© The National Gallery, London (Figs. 1–3, 6–7, 17, pp. 167–169, 172–173, 179)
© The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo/Jarre Anne Hansteen, CC-BY-NC (Fig. 8, p. 174)
© Nicholas Penny (Figs. 9–10, 12–14, 16, pp. 175, 177, 179)
© Museum Gustavianum, Upppsala (Fig. 11, p. 176)
© Getty Museum CC-BY. Digital image courtesy of the Gettys Open Content Program (Fig. 15, p. 178)
© The Swedish Royal Court/Håkan Lind (Fig. 9, p. 188)
© Eva-Lena Bergström (Figs. 1, 3–4, 6–7, 9, pp. 191–192, 194–196, 198)
© Statens Museum for Kunst/National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, CC-PD (Fig. 2, p. 193)
© The Nordic Museum, Stockholm/Karolina Kristensson (Fig. 5, p. 195)

Graphic Design
BIGG

Layout
Agneta Bervokk

Translation and Language Editing
Gabriella Berggren, Erika Milburn and Martin Naylor

Publishing
Janna Herder (Editor) and Ingrid Lindell (Publications Manager)

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum is published annually and contains articles on the history and theory of art relating to the collections of the Nationalmuseum.

Nationalmuseum
Box 16176
SE-103 24 Stockholm, Sweden
www.nationalmuseum.se
© Nationalmuseum, the authors and the owners of the reproduced works

ISSN 2001-9238

Nationalmuseum @
**ACQUISITIONS/STUDY OF A BOY’S HEAD**

Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, *Study of a Boy’s Head*

Carina Fryklund
Curator, Old Master Drawings and Paintings

This oil study of a mischievous-looking boy with plump, rosy cheeks and tousled blond corkscrew locks, was painted by the Flemish artist Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (1613–1654) in the mid-1640s (Fig. 1). With head tipped slightly back and to the side, the model looks at us with a mixture of curiosity and reserve. The virtuoso brushwork in the curly hair, using a system of highlights arranged in constantly changing directions, lend it a quality reminiscent of foaming and churning waters. Perhaps the boy was the son of someone in the artist’s close circle of friends. The fact that this study was intended to be used for a painting with a mythological theme is suggested, however, by the classicizing garb in the form of a blue fabric draped across the model’s naked shoulders. Transformed into a beautiful, pale youth with golden locks, the boy modelled for the god of love in the monumental painting *Amor Triumphant Amongst the Emblems of Art, Science and War*, which Willeboirts Bosschaert painted around 1645 in collaboration with the well-known painter of animals and still lifes, Paul de Vos (Figs. 2–3). The painting was in Queen Lovisa Ulrika’s art collection.

---

Fig. 1 Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (c. 1613–1654).
*Study of a Boy’s Head*, c. 1644/45.
Oil on oak panel, 37.5 x 29.3 cm.
Purchase: Sara and Johan Emil Graumann Fund/
The Friends of the Nationalmuseum.
Nationalmuseum, NM 7295.
in the 18th century and now belongs to the Nationalmuseum. Thanks to a generous donation from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, the original “portrait” of the model has now been acquired and added to the Museum’s collection of Baroque paintings. The painting, with a provenance from the Stirling family (Scotland), was acquired from Salomon Lilian, Amsterdam.

The history and portrait painter Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert was born around 1613 in a wealthy family in Bergen op Zoom. After leaving his native city for the metropolis of Antwerp, he was apprenticed in 1628 to the renowned history painter Gerard Seghers (1591–1651).  

Nine years later, in 1637, he was accepted as a master painter in the Saint Luke’s Guild and obtained citizenship in the city the same year. Shortly after, he was invited by Antwerp’s leading and internationally famous history painter Peter Paul Rubens to collaborate on a series of paintings for the Spanish King Philip IV’s hunting lodge, the Torre de la Parada. Notwithstanding his close collaboration with Rubens, the young artist was more profoundly influenced by Anthony van Dyck’s refined painting style from the period around 1630. Willeboirts Bosschaert subsequently achieved great success with his own elegant imagery in the spirit of Van Dyck. He painted altarpieces for churches and monasteries in Antwerp and was received several large commissions from the Dutch Stadtholder, Prince Frederick Henry of Orange, who recognised the artist as a skilled Van Dyck epigone. Among Willeboirts Bosschaert’s works executed between 1642 and 1647 were a series of 17 paintings with mythological themes for the Stadholder’s country residence, the Huis ten Bosch. In 1649, he was appointed a deacon of the Saint Luke’s Guild, enabling him the following year to purchase the house where the artist Jan Brueghel the Elder had

Fig. 2 Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (c. 1613–1654), Amor Triumphant Amongst the Emblems of Art, Science and War, c. 1644/45. Oil on canvas, 169.2 x 241.8 cm. Nationalmuseum, NM 410.
formerly had his studio. Willeboirts Bosschaert died unmarried and childless on 23 January, 1654, after a period of ill health.

Since the 16th century, Antwerp had been the most important city for artists north of the Alps, with a thriving art market. One consequence of the great demand for domestic and international art was that artists became increasingly specialised and collaborated intimately with other artists. Landscape and still life painters, for instance, often enlisted figure painters to populate their works. In the case of *Amor Triumphant Amongst the Emblems of Art, Science and War*, Willeboirts Bosschaert was probably responsible for the general composition, including the figure of Amor, while de Vos painted the still-life details in the foreground (Fig. 2). The motif is an allegorical representation of the triumph of love, a popular theme during the Baroque era, based on a quote from Virgil: “Omnia vincit Amor” (Love conquers all). The love god’s attributes are the bow and arrow and quiver. The figure of Amor, whose particular pose is derived from a lost painting by Van Dyck, is accompanied here by symbols of human culture, such as music, art, science and war. In the background can be seen a broken column and a fallen sculpture of a bearded man, possibly Hercules, who personifies virtue. The painting as a whole could then be interpreted as a moralising representation of two opposing principles – love and virtue. Its message to the viewer being that straying from the virtuous path leads to perdition.

*Amor Triumphant* is the earliest known example where the oil study of the boy with the blond locks was used in Willeboirts Bosschaert’s production. It was probably made in preparation for the larger painting, where the pose and lighting are identical (Figs. 1 and 3). The head study was executed in oil on a support consisting of an oak panel in one piece (later extended), prepared with a thin, white chalk ground on top of which a semi-transparent, light brown imprimatura was applied using a broad bristle brush. The artist then sketched the motif in

---

*Fig. 3 Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (c. 1613–1654),* *Amor Triumphant Amongst the Emblems of Art, Science and War,* c. 1644/45. Oil on canvas, 169.2 x 241.8 cm. Nationalmuseum, NM 410 (detail).
black on the white ground with chalk and a fine brush, before he began painting (Fig. 4). Character head studies in oil, so-called tronies, often painted after live models, were a common occurrence in Flemish studio practice, especially in Rubens’ circle. As early as the 16th century, the Antwerp-based artist Frans Floris (1516–1570) had used such oil head studies in his extensive workshop production. But it was Rubens, possibly inspired by Italian examples, who reintroduced tronies in the 1610s, as part of the creative process in Flemish studios, partly as a time-saving device. These studies were often made specifically for a particular work, although they were sometimes reused in entirely different contexts. They formed a vital part of the artists’ store of patterns and were kept in the studio for future use. They were also frequently copied, both within and outside the studio, and sold as works of art in their own right on the open art market. When he died in 1654, Willeboirts Bosschaert bequeathed twelve of his own head studies and one by Van Dyck to one of his collaborators.

Willeboirts Bosschaert’s boy’s head soon became a favourite among several of his fellow artists in Antwerp, who, like the artist himself, frequently copied and used this charming, lively study in widely different contexts. The fair-haired boy with tousled corkscrew curls falling across his forehead often made an appearance as an angel or cherub – for instance in Willeboirts Bosschaert’s The Assumption of the Virgin Mary from the late 1640s (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp). Another version of the Nationalmuseum’s oil head study is in the Hamburger Kunsthalle (Fig. 5). The latter could possibly be a copy by an artist in Willeboirts Bosschaert’s circle. In a vanitas allegory from c. 1650 attributed to Willeboirts Bosschaert’s close friend and colleague David Ryckaert III, an old man is seen studying a copy of the familiar boy’s head, as the very embodiment of youth (Fig. 6). In fact, Willeboirts Bosschaert’s model became something of a fixture on the Antwerp art circuit, resurfa-

Fig. 4 Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (c. 1613–1654), Study of a Boy’s Head, c. 1644/45. Oil on oak panel, 37.5 x 29.3 cm. Nationalmuseum, NM 7295 (detail from IRR image).
Acquisitions/Study of a Boy’s Head

Fig. 5 Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert (?), Study of a Boy’s Head, c. 1644/45. Oil on wood, 46.5 x 33.8 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Inv. 382.

Notes:

Cing again as late as the early 18th century, as a model for the child of a woman having her portrait painted, in a studio interior by Balthasar van den Bossche.

15
including Jan van den Hoecke, have also made use of the study; see the bibliography cited in footnote 1. Arnout Balis was the first to identify the painting now in the Nationalmuseum collection as the original version of this popular and frequently copied model, attributing it to Willeboirts Bosschaert; see Balis 2000, p. 150, note 74.


Fig. 6 David Ryckaert III (1612–1661), Old Man with Vanitas Still Life, c. 1650/52. Museum Bredius, The Hague.


6. The painting was examined by infra-red reflectography by paintings conservator Rickard Becklén at the Nationalmuseum on 6 October, 2010. A CCD-camera Fujifilm IS Pro (380–1100 nm), with a 093 87A filter, was used for the examination.


11. Oil on oak panel, 49.5 x 33.8 cm, Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, inv. no. 382; see Heinrich 2003, no. A44, fig. 71; T. Ketelsen, Claudia Brink, and Gerrit Walezak, Die Sammlungen der Hamburger Kunsthalle, Die niederländischen Gemälde 1500–1800, no. 382. Over the years, several scholars have discussed the head study in Hamburg, attributing it to both Willeboirts Bosschaert and David Ryckaert III, while noting that other artists,