Circle of Hendrick Goltzius, *Study of a Male Lumpsucker*

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Fig. 1 Circle of Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617). *Study of a Male Lumpsucker (Cyclopterus lumpus L.)*, 1590s. Watercolour and washes, over traces of black and red chalk, 226 x 365 mm. Purchase: The Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 12/2015.
The Nationalmuseum has acquired an impressive watercolour *Study of a Male Lumpsucker* (Fig. 1), dating probably from the mid- to late 1590s. The drawing is closely connected with a group of nature studies executed around the same time by the Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), an important figure in the rising tide of interest in the phenomena of the natural world that occurred in Europe in the second half of the 16th century. Interest in nature in all its forms had the highest academic priority, and received a fresh impetus not least from the Haarlem circle in which Goltzius moved. There were menageries at many European courts, and universities founded botanical gardens. The recording of different aspects of the visible world formed part of the humanist creed, and inspired contemporary collectors to assemble albums of increasingly accurate drawings from nature and to fill their cabinets with valuable specimens. By the last decades of the 16th century, studies of animals and plants had become an established genre in the Netherlands, with precedents in the art of Albrecht Dürer and Joris Hoefnagel. Commissioned by rulers, universities, and collectors, artists were making large numbers of detailed drawings of plants and animals from nature.

The present life-size study of a male lumpsucker would have fitted perfectly in a distinguished 16th-century cabinet of natural history. The image is entirely in line with the urge at the time to record the details of different species of animals, particularly the rarer ones. Found in coastal areas of the Atlantic, the lumpsucker is a poor

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Fig. 2 Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), *Lumpsucker*, 1589. Black, red and yellow chalk, washes, 230 x 310 mm. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.
swimmer and spends most of its life stuck in rocky crevices. Its thick skin lacks scales, rows of wart-like lumps run the length of its sides and back, while the ventral fins form a sectorial disc on its belly. Its back is blue-grey, the sides are paler. In the male the colours are at their most intense during the mating season, as seen here, when its sides, belly, and fins turn a red-orange. This study, executed with a brush in watercolour and ink washes, over traces of black and red chalk, combines transparency and opacity in such a way that the colour and special texture of the lump sucker is rendered in a wholly realistic fashion. Due to its unusual appearance, the lump sucker seems to have been regarded as something of a curiosity and was, for example, represented by a specimen in the Theatrum Anatomicum at Leiden in the 1620s. Moving beyond the nascent spirit of scientific enquiry, unfamiliar natural phenomena of all kinds could also encompass negative associations to the occult. It is thus possible that the odd-looking lump sucker might have been interpreted as a bad omen.²

The Stockholm study was long considered to be a work by Goltzius himself, based on comparisons with his meticulous coloured study of a lump sucker (Fig. 2), signed and dated "1589", in Brussels (Bibliothèque Royale Albert I).³ The artist here resorted to a combination of coloured chalks and ink washes that is unusually elaborate among his surviving drawings, inviting associations to Dürer, who had used watercolour in several studies of plants and animals. Goltzius clearly had a particular interest in rare species of fish and marine mammals. Aside from the lump sucker, he drew a John Dory (Haarlem, Teylers Museum)⁴ (Fig. 3), a sperm whale and a pilot whale and, through old sale catalogues, we also know of a crab and a shark. In terms of materials and technique, however, the newly acquired sheet differs from Goltzius' autograph studies, a majority of which were drawn almost entirely in coloured chalks with only some added wash. The Stockholm drawing is, therefore, no longer considered to be a work by the Haarlem master, but rather by someone in his immediate circle.

The study comes from the renowned collection assembled by Professor I. Q. van Regteren Altena (1899–1986), Amsterdam, and its purchase was made possible through a generous contribution from the

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Fig. 3 Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), John Dory (Zeus faber L.), c. 1595–1600. Various coloured chalks, rubbed with a stump, lightly washed, 179 x 319 mm. Teylers Museum, Haarlem.
Wiros Fund. It represents a significant addition to the Museum’s excellent collection of Old Master drawings and, at the same time, adds a new perspective to the group of nature studies by Goltzius and his circle.

**Notes:**
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