



Hendrick Goltzius
Dutch, 1558 - 1617

The Fall of Man

1616

oil on canvas

overall: 104.5 x 138.4 cm (41 1/8 x 54 1/2 in.)

framed: 128.9 x 163.2 x 10.2 cm (50 3/4 x 64 1/4 x 4 in.)

Inscription: lower left in monogram: HG / AE 1616

Patrons' Permanent Fund 1996.34.1

ENTRY

In this magnificent image, Adam and Eve recline like mythological lovers in the Garden of Eden, portrayed at the very moment they become aware of their mutual desire. [1] Having already taken a bite from the apple, Eve turns toward Adam with a knowing gaze as she tenderly touches his chest. Mesmerized, Adam gently draws Eve toward him with his left arm as he looks into her eyes with intense longing. Adam also holds fruit, a tender fig that he squeezes between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, a gesture as laden with sensual overtones as is the partially eaten apple. [2] The compelling emotional force of this moment is enhanced by the surrounding plants and animals, which Goltzius has painted in a bewitchingly believable fashion.

Goltzius entices his viewer to become fully engaged in this intimate encounter by placing the life-size figures of Adam and Eve close to the picture plane where one senses the fullness of their physical presence and the power of their mutual attraction. [3] Adam and Eve's bodies are perfectly proportioned, with skin that yields gently to the touch. As they lie there entirely naked except for the ground ivy that covers Adam's genitals, light plays across their bodies, modeling Adam's

muscular body as well as Eve's softer form with its paler, more transparent flesh tones. Nevertheless, their idealized bodies have a physicality that fully explains their inability to restrain their primal appetites. That failure will lead to their expulsion from Eden and humanity's fall from grace.

So beguiling is this portrayal that one can almost understand how Adam and Eve remained oblivious to the dire consequences of their actions as they discovered these new and unexpected emotions. Yet, as is narrated in the book of Genesis (Genesis 3:1–7), Adam and Eve had been told not to eat the fruit from the tree in the midst of the garden lest they die. The serpent, however, persuaded Eve that eating this fruit would allow them to be like God, knowing good from evil. She partook of the fruit and then passed it on to Adam, who ate as well. Consequently, their eyes were opened, and, realizing they were naked, they sewed together fig leaves to cover themselves. God drove the couple from his earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden, and neither they nor their offspring would ever be allowed to return.

Goltzius' seductive rendering of *The Fall of Man* differs in fundamental ways from the pictorial tradition of this biblical theme. Prior images, including Goltzius' drawing of *The Fall*, c. 1597 [fig. 1], and his large painting of 1608, now in the Hermitage, had depicted the couple standing or sitting at the moment when Eve was either receiving the apple from the serpent or passing it on to Adam. [4] Here, as Adam languidly gazes at Eve, who is eating from the forbidden apple, his pose reflects that of his counterpart in Michelangelo's ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where Adam awaits the spark of life from God the Father. [5] As exceptional as it was for Adam and Eve to be depicted as lovers reclining in their paradisiacal setting, it was even more unprecedented for a painting of them to focus on their rapt gazes and mutual yearnings rather than on the transfer of the apple.

Little in the demeanor of Adam and Eve indicates the grave consequences of their actions, although Goltzius alludes to the momentousness of the occasion. The animals surrounding the couple in the Garden of Eden provide a symbolic framework for how the viewer ought to respond to the scene. Most important to the biblical narrative, of course, is the serpent that leads Eve astray. Far from the evil and menacing creature that one often finds in such depictions, Goltzius' serpent is sweet-faced and female-headed, a warning about the deceptiveness of appearances. [6] The goat traditionally signified unrestrained lust and the unchaste; as such, it was frequently included in images of *The Fall* (see fig. 1). [7] Karel van Mander I (Netherlandish, 1548 - 1606), whose writings Goltzius would have

thoroughly known, gave a particularly pointed symbolic interpretation for this animal. For him the goat also signified “the whore, who destructs young men, just [as it] browses and violates the young green shoots,” [8] an interpretation that Goltzius has followed: the goat nearest Eve chomps on young grasses.

The elephant and hare in the far distance have different relationships to Adam and Eve. Both animals have turned their backs on the scene and are departing the area as quickly as possible. The hare probably leaps away in fear of the consequences of Adam and Eve’s actions, since fear is one of the attributes Van Mander gave to this animal. [9] On the other hand, the elephant was traditionally associated with piety, temperance, and chastity, so little wonder that Goltzius depicted it in fast retreat. [10]

The most fascinating and riveting of all the animals in the scene is the cat in the immediate foreground, which is so realistically painted that one can almost hear it breathe. Although the cat was traditionally viewed as a symbol of lust and sensual pleasure, for Van Mander this animal served as a warning to the viewer about being an unjust judge. [11] The cat’s penetrating gaze, from which there is no escape, reminds spectators not to condemn others for the very vices of which they are themselves guilty.

The Fall of Man is among a number of paintings Goltzius executed between 1613 and 1616 that focus on lovers in a landscape, including *Venus and Adonis*, 1614 [fig. 2], which depicts the goddess gently embracing Adonis as she, in vain, urges him to stay with her and avoid the hunt. Much as with Adam and Eve, the two figures gaze into each other’s eyes, with their young, idealized bodies arrayed in the immediate foreground for the visual enjoyment of the spectator. The style and character of *Venus and Adonis*, and all of Goltzius’ subsequent paintings, owe much to the influence of Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640), who visited Goltzius in Haarlem in June 1612 in search of an engraver to make reproductive prints after his paintings. Goltzius, who had turned his attention to painting around 1600 after his successful career as an engraver, had previously sought to master the rendering of flesh, which Van Mander considered to be one of the most difficult things to paint and thus a crucial test of a painter’s skill. [12] It was only after Rubens’ visit, however, that Goltzius learned how to create sensual painted images by blending his brushstrokes to create the luminosity of flesh and by focusing on the emotions of love and longing. [13] It is not known which of this Flemish master’s paintings Goltzius actually saw at that time, but one of them could have been a *Venus and Adonis* that was in the Delft collection of Boudewijn de Man (c.

1570/1575–after 1644), who likely was the first owner of Goltzius' *The Fall of Man*.
[14]

Although Rubens had a great impact on Goltzius' painting style in the mid-1610s, no one would ever confuse the works of the two artists. Goltzius never assimilated the lessons of his experiences in Italy in 1590–1591 to the same extent that Rubens had during his prolonged stay there in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The idealization of classically inspired figures in Rubens' paintings was of a different order than the idealization of comparable figures in Goltzius' paintings. For example, even though Adam's pose relates in many ways to that of the antique sculpture of the river god Tiber that Goltzius drew in Rome in 1591 [fig. 3], Goltzius has given Adam's body a sinuous, rhythmic flow reminiscent of the artist's late sixteenth-century mannerist style.

Goltzius must have based this composition on a number of drawings that he made from life. The goat nearest Eve, for example, is practically a mirror image of a metalpoint drawing he made in 1591–1594. [15] Documents indicate that Goltzius also made a drawing of a cat, which was probably similar in character to the goat drawing. [16] Drawings likely served as models for both Adam and Eve since the poses of both figures are found in other paintings. For example, Goltzius used Eve's pose for one of the daughters in *Lot and His Daughters*, 1616, in the Rijksmuseum. [17] Interestingly, by 1616 Goltzius had already used Adam's pose twice when depicting a female figure. In his *Vertumnus and Pomona* of 1613, the goddess of fruit reclines in a landscape just as Adam does, but facing the opposite direction [fig. 4]. In 1615 she appears in mirror image, in the pose that Goltzius would use for Adam one year later. [18] It is testimony to the artist's genius that each of the permutations of this figure seems so compellingly natural and integrated into its narrative.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Hendrick Goltzius, *The Fall*, c. 1597, pen and brown ink, brush in various colors, British Museum, London.
Photo © Trustees of the British Museum



fig. 2 Hendrick Goltzius, *Venus and Adonis*, 1614, oil on canvas, Bayerische Staatsgemaldehysammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Photo: bpk, Berlin / Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemaldehysammlungen, Munich / Art Resource, NY



fig. 3 Hendrick Goltzius, *The River God Tiber*, 1591, black chalk on blue paper, heightened with white, Teylers Museum, Haarlem



fig. 4 Hendrick Goltzius, *Vertumnus and Pomona*, 1613, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

NOTES

- [1] I would like to thank Lynn Russell and Lieneke Nijkamp for their assistance with this text.
- [2] Portrayals of fig trees or figs in emblem books signified abundance as well as the Resurrection of Christ. In this painting, because Adam holds the fig but has not yet eaten from the apple, he is still—at least for now—worthy of the abundance of the Garden of Eden. The fig in his hand could also represent God’s promise of mankind’s redemption through the future sacrifice and resurrection of his son. See Arthur Henkel and A. Schöne, eds., *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1967), lx–lxi and 241–242, citing Georgia Montanea, *Monumenta Emblematum Christianorum Virtutum* (1571; reprint, Frankfurt, 1619), 24.
- [3] For an excellent discussion of Goltzius’ ability to seduce the eye and afford sensual pleasure through the depiction of beauty, see Eric Jan Sluijter, “Venus, Visus and Pictura,” in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age*, trans. Jennifer Kilian and Katy Kist (Zwolle, 2000), 86–159.
- [4] Much like his painting of 1616, Goltzius’ drawing of 1597 includes a cat and a goat in the foreground. The most important of these prior images of *The Fall of Man* was the engraving *Adam and Eve*, 1504, by Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471 - 1528), which served as the basis for the monumental painting of this subject by Goltzius’ colleague in Haarlem, Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (Dutch, 1562 - 1638). Cornelis painted his work for the Prinsenhof in Haarlem in 1592. See Ger Luijten, *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish*

Art, 1580–1620 (Amsterdam, 1993), 337–338, no. 7. For Goltzius' painting of 1608 in the Hermitage, see Huigen Leeftang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 268–269, fig. 102.

- [5] I would like to thank Rachel Pollack for this observation.
- [6] See Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, vol. 2, pt. 1 of 2 (Paris, 1956), 84. For an overview of Renaissance and baroque prints depicting Adam and Eve, see H. Diane Russell, *Eva/Ave: Woman in Renaissance and Baroque Prints* (Washington, DC, 1990), 113–130.
- [7] This goat is in exactly the same pose as that of Goltzius' 1616 painting, indicating that he used the same preliminary drawing for both works.
- [8] Karel van Mander, "Wtbeeldinge der figueren . . .," in Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 129r. "De Geyte beteyckent de Hoere / die de jonghe knechten verderft / ghelijck de Geyt de jonghe groen spruyten afknaeght en scheyndet." The translation is taken from Huigen Leeftang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 332 n. 156.
- [9] Karel van Mander, "Wtbeeldinge der figueren . . .," in Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 130r. "Met hem wort de vreesse beteyckent: want hy een seer vreesachtigh Dier is" (with him fear is meant, since he is a fearful animal). Huigen Leeftang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 302, no. 111, on the other hand, interprets the rabbit as symbolizing carnality.
- [10] The positive assessment of the elephant's virtues goes back to Pliny, who wrote that the animals "possess virtues rare even in man, honesty, wisdom, justice." He also noted that they hate serpents. See H. Rackham, *Pliny Natural History* (Cambridge, MA, 1940), 3, book 8. For Christian symbolism related to the elephant, see Leonard J. Slatkes, "Rembrandt's Elephant," *Simiolus* 11, no.1 (1980): 7–13. Van Mander goes so far as to ascribe the attribute "Godliness" to it. Karel van Mander, "Wtbeeldingeder figueren . . .," in Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 128r. "Den Oliphant beteyckent den Coningh / en d'Egyptysche hebben hem daer mede beteyckent. Den Oliphant / in een water siende nae een nieuw Maen / beteyckent de Godsdiensticheyt / oft Godsvruchticheyt: want sy alle Maende hun suyveren met de nieuw Maen / die sy schijnen te eeren."
- [11] Karel van Mander, "Wtbeeldinge der figueren . . .," in Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 130r. "De Katte beteyckent een onrechtveerdigh Richter: want sy is dickwils in huys schadigher als de Muysen / die sy als meesten dief / om hun dieverije straffende is."
- [12] For the painting of flesh, see Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Fleshing Out the Body: The 'Colours of the Naked' in Workshop, Practice, and Theory, 1400–1600,"

in *Body and Embodiment in Netherlandish Art / Lichaam en lichamelijkheid in de Nederlandse kunst*, ed. A. S. Lehmann and H. Roodenburg, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 58 (Zwolle, 2008): 87–107; Paul Taylor, “The Glow in Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Dutch Paintings,” in *Looking through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research*, ed. Erma Hermens, *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 11 (Delft, 1998): 159–178; and Eric Jan Sluijter, “Goltzius’ Painting and Flesh or Why Goltzius Began to Paint in 1600,” in *The Learned Eye: Regarding Art, Theory, and the Artist’s Reputation—Essays for Ernst van de Wetering*, ed. M. van den Doel (Amsterdam, 2005): 158–177. I would like to thank Perry Chapman for providing me with these references.

- [13] For further discussion of Rubens’ influence on the pictorial character of *The Fall of Man*, see Huigen Leeflang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 302, no. 111.
- [14] For Boudewijn de Man, see Jaap van der Veen, “Delftse verzamelingen in de zeventiende en eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw,” in *Burgers verzamelen 1600–1750: Schatten in Delft* (Delft, 2002), 72–74. The sale of Boudewijn de Man’s collection occurred in Delft on March 15, 1644. De Man owned almost seventy paintings, including three by Rubens, among them a *Venus and Adonis*. This work sold for f. 500, and was the most expensive painting in his large collection. *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1612, was probably the painting of that subject in the Mauritshuis (inv. no. 254), which is now considered a studio replica of Rubens’ painting in Düsseldorf. De Man owned three Goltzius paintings, among them *Adam and Eve*, which sold for f. 110. One of De Man’s other paintings by Goltzius was an “Abel in het verkort” (Abel in foreshortening), which has been identified as *The Dead Adonis*, 1609, in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (inv. no. SK-A-1284). Whether or not De Man commissioned these paintings (he did commission other works), it seems probable that Goltzius would have known his collection. I would like to thank Jaap van der Veen for providing me with a list of the contents of De Man’s sale.
- [15] This drawing is illustrated in Huigen Leeflang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 176, no. 60.
- [16] Huigen Leeflang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 176.
- [17] Huigen Leeflang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 304–305, no. 112.
- [18] This painting is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. See Huigen Leeflang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2003), 300–301, no. 110.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a thin, fine-weight, plain-weave fabric. It has been lined to a coarser fabric and subsequently strip-lined. The tacking margins have been removed. There is slight cusping on the top and the left sides, but none on the right or the bottom. This information, coupled with the proximity of the figures' limbs to the edges of the painting, could indicate that the edges may have been trimmed slightly in the past. The ground is a thin, light brown layer. The paint is thin and fluid in most of the composition, but thicker around the areas of flesh that require greater definition, such as the fingers, toes, and facial features. The paint is thickest in the cat, where Goltzius used rich brushwork to create the texture of the fur.

The X-radiographs show numerous losses to the support along the edges. They are most abundant along the top edge. The paint is tented, but secure and in good condition. There are a few rather small losses scattered throughout the composition in addition to the losses along the edges. There is also a vertical scratch in Eve's neck. The painting was strip-lined and mounted onto a new stretcher in 1998. Discolored varnish and inpainting were also removed at that time.

PROVENANCE

Possibly Boudewijn de Man, Delft; (his sale, Delft, 15 March 1644, no. 2, as *Een Adam ende Eva*).^[1] Possibly private collection, Amsterdam, 1671.^[2] Probably (anonymous sale, Hubert and Dupuy at Salle des Grands-Augustins, Paris, 3 June 1774 and following days, no. 34, as *Adam & Eve*).^[3] (Camillo Davico, Turin), before 1936; purchased 1936 by Prof. Mario Micheletti, Turin; acquired 1972 by private collection, Switzerland;^[4] (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, New York, 15 May 1996, no. 51); purchased by NGA.

[1] Owners through 1774, and the accompanying footnotes documenting the sources, are taken from the 1996 Christie's sale catalogue. Boudewijn de Man's ownership of "Een Adam ende Eva van Goltius [florins] 110" is documented in

Gemeente Archief Delft, Notary archive no. 1861, deed no. 2035.

[2] Hendrik Houmes' annotation "een Adam en Eva op de cingel tot Amsterdam" is in a copy of van Mander's *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 286 recto, preserved in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam.

[3] Lot 34 in this sale is described as "Adam & Eve de Goltius, Pouc. de haut 40". It therefore measured approximately 100 centimeters in height (the width was not recorded), and it sold for 49.7 francs.

[4] The anonymous Swiss owner provided information about the ownership by Davico and Micheletti to Lawrence W. Nichols in a letter of 6 March 1984. See Lawrence Wells Nichols, "The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617)," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1990: 185.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

2000 Art for the Nation: Collecting for a New Century, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2000-2001, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

2003 Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617): Drawings, Prints and Paintings, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art, 2003-2004, no. 111, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1869 Possibly Biscarra, Carlo F. *Accademia Albertina*. Turin, 1869: no. 95, possibly as "copia da Giacomo Jordaens--Adamo ed Eva originale degli Uffizi".
- 1990 Nichols, Lawrence W. "The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617)." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1990: 128, 142-146, 185, no. A-2.
- 1996 Yapou, Yonna. "Dutch Acquisitions in Washington." *Apollo* 144, no. 418 (December 1996): 20, repro.
- 2000 Filedt Kok, Jan Piet. *Netherlandish art in the Rijksmuseum, 1600-1700*.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

- Netherlandish art in the Rijksmuseum 2. Zwolle, 2000: 72-73, fig. 12b.
- 2000 National Gallery of Art. *Art for the Nation: Collecting for a New Century*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2000: 22-23, color repro.
- 2003 Leeflang, Huigen, and Ger Luijten. *Hendrick Goltzius, 1558-1617: drawings, prints and paintings*. Exh. cat. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio. Zwolle, 2003: 302-303, cat. no. 111.
- 2004 Filedt Kok, Jan Piet. "De wisselvallige reputatie van Hendrick Goltzius." *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 52, no. 1 (2004): 52-53, fig. 29.
- 2004 Hand, John Oliver. *National Gallery of Art: Master Paintings from the Collection*. Washington and New York, 2004: 216-217, no. 173, color repro
- 2011 Liedtke, Walter. "Frans Hals: Style and Substance." *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 22, color fig. 21.
- 2013 Nichols, Lawrence W. *The Paintings of Hendrick Goltzius, 1558-1617: A Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné*. Doornspijk, 2013: 86-88, no. A-2, color pls. 53, 53a, 53b.
- 2014 Wheelock, Arthur K, Jr. "The Evolution of the Dutch Painting Collection." *National Gallery of Art Bulletin* no. 50 (Spring 2014): 2-19, repro.
-

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Hendrick Goltzius/*The Fall of Man*/1616," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/95659> (accessed April 11, 2025).