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The *Calumny of Apelles*. A rediscovered masterpiece by Maarten de Vos

Maja Neerman, Christina Currie, Gaëlle Pentier, Steven Saverwyns and Louise Decq

Introduction

In 1993, a large painting by Maarten de Vos (1532-1603), entitled the *Calumny of Apelles*, was sold at Christie's London [fig. 1].¹ It was brought to the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in 2013 for technical examination and is now on long-term loan at the Rubens House in Antwerp. Up until this point it had never been studied, published or exhibited.² According to the Christie's catalogue, it came from the collection of 'A Lady of Title', and previously, in 1927, had been put up for auction at Christie's London by a G. Canty of Lincolnshire, incorrectly titled as the *Judgement of Midas* by Frans Floris.³ Nothing else is known about its earlier provenance, which remains a mystery.

In view of its artistic quality and intriguing theme that fits within a broader literary and visual tradition, the *Calumny of Apelles* can be considered one of De Vos's major works, uniting many elements that are characteristic for his oeuvre. The first part of this article will provide an art-historical context for the work within the broader tradition of the *Calumny of Apelles* and define its place within De Vos's oeuvre

and the socio-political context of the time. The second part will relate the discoveries of the technical study, which turned out to be crucial for understanding the transformation of the painting's composition, colour values and format over time.

Apelles to De Vos: from literary to visual tradition

In his treatise on slander, the Greek rhetorician Lucian (AD 125-180) included a description of the painting *Calumny* by the artist Apelles (fourth century BC).⁴ After warning the reader extensively about the dangers of ignorance, Lucian recounts how the distinguished painter Apelles responded to slanderous accusations from a rival by painting an allegorical work illustrating his predicament. Apelles had been falsely and maliciously accused by the envious painter Antiphilus of conspiring with Theodotas in the insurrection of Tyre against the Macedonian general Ptolemy.⁵

The furious general was about to have Apelles executed for his alleged crime when one of his acquaintances brought the truth to light, claiming the prominent artist could in no way have been involved in this affair. Apelles was released and the slanderer was sold into slavery. After having barely escaped capital punishment, Apelles painted his ingenious *Calumny* in which he assigned the king his asinine ears and pre-

1 Important and Fine Old Master Pictures, London, Christie's, 9 July 1993, lot 29, p. 48-49.

2 The painting was studied in consultation with Maja Neerman, whose master's thesis focused on the iconography of the painting: *De Calomnie van Apelles: een herontdekt schilderij van Maarten de Vos*, academic year 2014-2015, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Brussels; Neerman 2014. The first part of this article is entirely based on this thesis.

3 The man on the throne was erroneously interpreted as being King Midas, who, according to the ancient Greek myth, was cursed by Apollo and given the ears of a donkey for issuing an unjust ruling against Pan in a musical competition. *Catalogue of Views of Salisbury by J.M.W. Turner: Ancient and Modern Pictures and Drawings*, London, Christie's, 28 July 1927, p. 24.

4 Lucianus Samosatensis 1913, p. 359-394.

5 This story is apocryphal, since about a century separates Apelles and the treason of Ptolemy by Theodotus (and not Theodotas) (Altrocchi 1921, p. 454; Massing 1990, p. 15-18).





◀ [Fig. 1]

Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles*, 1594-1603, oil on panel, 111.3 × 180.1 cm (private collection). X067869L.

sented a series of personifications of states of mind and moral concepts. He thereby subtly recounted his own experience as well as illustrating the multiple facets and dangers of slander.

After the rediscovery of Lucian's text in the early fifteenth century, it quickly became a trusted reference within Renaissance culture, first in the literary tradition, then in the visual arts. Guarino da Verona (1374-1460), who saw the manuscript on his trip to Constantinople (1405-1408), was the first to translate the text into Latin. When he was later appointed as a professor of Greek at the Studio Fiorentino in Florence, he contributed to its publication and circulation, which made it widely known among the humanistic circles of Italy.⁶ The inherent relationship between text and image that characterizes this theme explains its first appearances in manuscripts. The popularity of the subject was then given a fresh impetus by Leon Battista Alberti, who in his *De Pictura* (1435) and *Della Pittura* (1436) invites artists to translate antique texts into visual compositions, explicitly mentioning the *Calumny* by Apelles as described by Lucian.⁷ Alberti knew Guarino's original text, but in his own translations he made errors that stray from the original.⁸ Artists such as Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445-1510), Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506), Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, 1483-1520), Lorenzo Leonbruno (1489-1537) and Federico Zuccaro (c. 1540-1609) all drew or painted versions of the *Calumny*, all of which were influential, even beyond Italian borders. The theme was consequently taken up by artists in France, Germany and the Netherlands.⁹

Inspired by Girolamo Mocetto (c. 1470-after 1531) and Giorgio Ghisi (1520-1582), Lambert Lombard (c. 1505-1566) drew two different compositions on the theme. Pieter Bruegel (c. 1525-1569) dated his drawing 1565 and around the second half of the 1610s Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) was inspired by Zuccaro's design to integrate the subject in the iconographic scheme of the facade of his atelier in Antwerp. Later, Jeremias van Winghe (1578-1645), Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600-1652/53), Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) all took on the theme as well.

The *Calumny of Apelles* as painted by Maarten de Vos, however, remains unparalleled. It is the first and only known painted version originating from the Southern Netherlands. Adding to its uniqueness and importance are the high quality, refinement and scale of the composition. Moreover, within the oeuvre of De Vos, it is a valuable source, not only regarding the painter's artistic genius, but also for his literary knowledge, his influences and his working methods.

Maarten de Vos as *pictor doctus*

Lucian described the painting by Apelles as follows:

On the right of it sits a man with very large ears, almost like those of Midas, extending his hand to Slander while she is still at some distance from him. Near him, on one side, stand two women – Ignorance, I think, and Suspicion. On the other side, Slander is coming up, a woman beautiful beyond measure, but full of passion and excitement, evincing as she does fury and wrath by carrying in her left hand a blazing torch and with the other dragging by the hair a young man who stretches out his hands to heaven and calls the gods to witness his innocence. She is conducted by a pale ugly man who has a piercing eye and looks as if he had wasted away in long illness; he may be supposed to be Envy. Besides, there are two women in attendance on Slander, egging her on, tiring her and tricking her out. According to the interpretation of them given to me by the guide to the picture, one was Treachery and the other Deceit. They were followed by a woman dressed in deep mourning, with black clothes all in tatters – Repentance, I think, her name was. At all events, she was turning back with tears in her eyes and casting a stealthy glance, full of shame, at Truth, who was approaching.¹⁰

The fidelity of De Vos's painting to the original text is striking. In comparison to many other artists who took part in this exercise, De Vos's knowledge of the original text is evident. This might be explained by the humanistic eagerness for studying the antique and presenting oneself as a *pictor doctus*. He may even have consulted more than one source since the possibilities are not limited to Lucian, Guarino or Alberti. Lambert Lombard, for instance, made his drawing based on an anonymous text from an illustrated manuscript by Benedetto Bordone (1460-1531) and it ap-

6 Altrocchi 1921, p. 457-461.

7 'if this "historia" seizes the imagination when described in words, how much beauty and pleasure do you think it presented in the actual painting of that excellent artist?' (Alberti and Grayson 1972, p. 3).

8 Förster 1886, p. 29-56.

9 For a full catalogue of known renderings of the *Calumny of Apelles*, see Massing 1990, p. 249-454.

10 Lucianus Samosatensis 1913, p. 365-367.

pears that Pieter Bruegel followed almost to the letter the translation of the text by Philip Melanchton (1497-1560).¹¹

Considering the wide distribution of Melanchton's translation, as well as the fact that it is particularly faithful to Lucian's text and given the translator's Lutheran background, it can be assumed that De Vos would have read Melanchton's version as well.¹² Nonetheless, certain features of De Vos's composition suggest that he is also likely to have had an intimate knowledge of the original version. He faithfully transposed the text to the panel following Lucian's description and never contradicted the guidelines, although his approach was not literal and he added new elements of his own. For example, he included the personification of Time, which is not mentioned in any of the aforementioned texts, and he chose to depict Innocence as a child rather than a 'young man'.

Lucian's indications of position or action and the description of distinct features in the main characters result in an effortless identification of these figures in De Vos's painting. Slander (*Calumnia*), Innocence (*Innocentia*), Envy (*Invidia*), Repentance (*Penitentia*) and Truth (*Veritas*) are straightforward personifications. The man with the asinine ears is not identified by name and could embody a king, general or judge. Nevertheless, his position in the painting and physical characteristics are explicitly mentioned in the text and are shown with the same clarity in the painting. It is with the figures that are secondary to the ekphrasis that Lucian seems to hesitate. In identifying the characters surrounding the crowned figure on the throne as Ignorance and Suspicion, he adds the hesitant words 'I think'. The naming of Treachery and Deceit is done 'according to the interpretation of them given to me by the guide to the picture'. This same kind of hesitation can be perceived in De Vos's painting. At first glance, the characters in both pairs of personifications give the impression of being interchangeable, as they seem to be lacking distinct features.

Contemporary iconography and an analysis of the iconographic schemes in De Vos's oeuvre suggest that the figure with the fishing net is Deceit, whom De Vos depicted entangled and placed at the foot of Justice in the *Tribunal of the Brabant Mint in Antwerp* [fig. 11]. This clever addition by De Vos corresponds with the descriptions in the *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa, the *Prosopographia* by Philips Galle, as well as in various depictions pairing Deceit with a fishing rod or holding a cage that refer to the intention of trap-

ping their victim.¹³ By a process of deduction, her companion has to be Treachery.

The other couple remains more mysterious. Many artists rendering the theme in drawing or print have made annotations identifying the figures, whose positions vary. Others have blindfolded one of them to distinguish Ignorance. De Vos, who, as mentioned before, was undoubtedly familiar with Lucian's description of Apelles' painting, must have had knowledge of the full text of *Calumniā non temere credendum* in which this description is found.

Lucian opens his exposition with an extensive passage on ignorance, meant as a clear warning to the reader, and refers back to it at the end. The function of the figure on the far right of De Vos's painting is not merely allegorical, or meant to complete the iconographic motif. Her importance, in accordance with the text, is her function as a narrative indicator to the viewer. Her posture, gesture and glance make it unambiguous, even to the uneducated spectator, that her invitation contains a warning and that the subject of the painting is moralizing in nature. Her gaze is mirrored in the eyes of Deceit, closing off the first and second act of the ekphrasis – that is to say, accusation and judgement. This use of the gaze of a character as a narrative technique is not uncommon in De Vos's oeuvre and reminiscent of countless Italian paintings, as well as recommended in the guidelines given by Alberti in *Della Pittura*.

In this painting, the demarcation of the different acts of the story is reinforced by the division of the space and surrounding elements, such as the tiled floor. This creates a border between the unpretentious good and the superficially corrupt, as well as a contrast between a rural landscape and an urban setting. In this instance, the rigidity and straightforwardness of this demarcation testify to the artist's intention to emphasize the narrative in accordance with Lucian's text. In light of that perspective, the opening figure can be assumed to be Ignorance.

11 Massing 1990, p. 352-354.

12 Melanchton taught Greek at a very young age at the university of Wittenberg (Richard 1898, p. 57-58).

13 'Donna che tenga in mano una canna con l'amo, col quale habbia preso un pesce, & altri pesci si vedano in un valo già morti, perchioche Fraude, ò inganno altro non è, che fingere di fare uno cosa buona, & fuori dell'opinione altrui farne una cattiva, come fà il pescatore, che porgendo mangiare a' mesci, gli prende, & amazza' (Ripa 1645, p. 231).

Artistic influences: Giorgio Ghisi

De Vos had an in-depth knowledge of the literary background of the theme and was adamant in showing that in his work. He might have first encountered the text or a visual rendition of it on his journey through Italy around 1552.¹⁴ His alleged travelling companion Pieter Bruegel drew his own version a few years after his return.¹⁵

However, it is an engraving circulating in Antwerp by Giorgio Ghisi after a painting by Luca Penni that most likely inspired De Vos visually [fig. 2]. Motifs similar in both designs include the torch, Hercules' statue in the background, and the positioning of the king's legs. Most strikingly, De Vos seems to have taken iconographic details from the engraving that represent the only additions to his otherwise perfect following of the antique text. However, De Vos's painting and Ghisi's engraving also differ in fundamental ways. The print avoids an isocephalic composition, incorporating depth and movement, with figures descending from the sky and moving towards the steps of the throne. Ghisi's engraving also incorporates additional figures into the procession, straying from the text, by giving Calumny four companions instead of two. These figures cannot be identified, are not interacting with Calumny and seem to serve no purpose other than to contribute to a balanced composition. De Vos does no such thing, however, and stays true to Lucian's text, maintaining a linear composition with the cortege moving from left to right.

Penni was presumably the first to use the Veritas Filia Temporis theme to depict the timely arrival of Truth.¹⁶ In Ghisi's engraving, this allegoric duo can be seen descending from the sky, heralding an impending alleviation of Innocence's distress. In De Vos's painting it is Time who, implored by Repentance's penetrating gaze, presents his daughter Truth to the king and his entourage, but mostly to the viewer. With this, De Vos puts the emphasis on the resolution of the tale and stresses the importance of the ekphrasis rather than the composition. Penni on the other hand, through Ghisi's engraving, gives so little interest to the story that one might question if he had any knowledge of the text at all, favouring the artistic value of a more dynamic composition.

Another iconographic element that is unique to both compositions is the net held by one of Calumny's companions, which identifies its holder as Deceit. Although it was fashionable in contemporary iconography and a recurrent tendency in De Vos's oeuvre to pair Deceit with the act of fishing, this particular



[Fig. 2]

Giorgio Ghisi after Luca Penni, *Calumny of Apelles*, 1560, engraving, 36.5 × 31.7 cm (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 56.507.75). © New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund.

addition to the *Calumny* was most likely inspired by Ghisi's engraving.

De Vos probably knew Ghisi, and if not, he at least knew his work. Ghisi was registered in the Guild of St Luke in 1551 as 'Joorge Mantewaen, coperen plaetsnyder'.¹⁷ De Vos became a master of the guild after his return from Italy in 1558. In 1571 he became dean and in 1572 chief dean. Ghisi, pupil of Giulio Romano (1492/99-1546), most likely travelled to Antwerp by invitation of Hieronymus Cock (1518-1570), who sought to adhere to the Romanistic trends of the time with his Aux Quatre Vents publishing house.¹⁸ Ghisi was the first Italian artist whose prints were published by Cock.¹⁹ His print of the *Calumny of Apelles* was published after he left the Southern Netherlands for France. It became well known in the Southern Netherlands and was copied by Lambert Lombard. The prints of the *Three Fates*, the *Allegory of Birth* and the *Calumny* were published under the royal privilege, most likely granted to Ghisi directly in 1559 after the sudden death of Henry II of France.

¹⁴ Zweite 1980, p. 21.

¹⁵ Massing 1990, p. 352-353.

¹⁶ Boorsch, Lewis and Lewis 1985, p. 111-112.

¹⁷ Rombouts and Van Lierus 1872, p. 175.

¹⁸ Karpinski 1959, p. 9; Delen 1935, p. 89.

¹⁹ Boorsch, Lewis and Lewis 1985, p. 17.

Dating of the work

The *Calumny of Apelles* is a late painting by De Vos. Several technical and stylistic elements can be put forward to support this hypothesis.

On the back of the oak panel on which the *Calumny* is painted there is a small mark of a six-pointed star, which is probably the mark of panel-maker Hans van Haecht [fig. 17 a]. Since he registered at the guild of Antwerp in 1589, this date can be used as a *terminus post quem* for the painting.

A further argument to a late dating of the painting are stylistic resemblances between the *Calumny of Apelles* and seven of a series of sixty-nine pen and bistre drawings, now at the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp. These drawings were made by De Vos as preparatory works for the decorations of the city for the event known as the Joyous Entry of the new Archduke Ernest of Austria, son of Maximilian II and Maria of Spain, held in 1594. Designs by De Vos and Ambrosius Francken had been commissioned for this occasion.²⁰ The surviving preparatory drawings by De Vos are mainly isolated allegorical figures with annotations in Dutch, Latin and a single instance in Greek, which seem to accord with the iconography found in the *Iconologia* by Ripa and the *Prosopographia* by Galle.

The striking resemblances between the painting and the drawings are stylistic rather than iconographic and lie mainly in the rendering of the clothing [fig. 3-8]. Dresses, corsets, sleeves and hairstyles are almost identical in the painting and the drawings. Facial types are also extremely similar. The young woman with pale, almost translucent skin, a small chin and rosy cheeks is a recurrent type in De Vos's works [fig. 9]. Since De Vos is known to have used and reused designs repeatedly to create new works, it is highly likely that the drawings predate the painting.

In 1594, De Vos was about sixty-two years old and therefore would have probably painted the *Calumny of Apelles* within the last nine years of his life, making it his last known allegorical painting and the figure Truth his last painted full nude.

Context: court, justice and religion

The *Calumny* fits oddly within De Vos's late oeuvre, when he was no longer producing allegorical themes in painting. His early career was dominated by commissions from prominent Protestant figures, such as Gilles Hoofman, Antonius Anselmus [fig. 10],²¹ Pieter Panhuys and Duke William the Younger of Bruns-

wick-Lüneburg. Because of his own Lutheran background, his discreet and tolerant character, diplomatic skills and prominent friends such as Abraham Ortelius and Johan Radermacher, De Vos appears not only to have been a well-respected painter but a valuable member of the Protestant community and humanist circles.

The massive wave of emigration to the north, ensuing from Alexander Farnese's capitulation orders after the Fall of Antwerp (1585), drastically changed the demographic of the south, and thereby its artistic landscape.²² De Vos, despite being Lutheran, remained in Antwerp, but was forced to convert to Catholicism. Many of his Protestant friends and contacts were persecuted or fled.²³ Farnese's further orders for the immediate restoration of churches and altars serving Catholic worship resulted in multiple assignments for De Vos. Large-scale altarpieces for the guilds with a strong Catholic theme characterize his late painted oeuvre, replacing those damaged or destroyed by iconoclasm and wars. His religious conversion, as well as his artistic but also diplomatic talents, made him one of the few remaining artists to build a sound career and substantial wealth during the period.²⁴ The reformistic and allegorical themes that predominated in his early painted oeuvre still seemed to greatly interest De Vos after 1585, but are confined to his printed output. This adds to the mystery of a painting like the *Calumny* and raises questions regarding its original destination or patron, about whom nothing is known for the time being.

From an artist's point of view, the motivation to depict the *Calumny of Apelles* is obvious. The theme presented the artist with the opportunity to paint a complex composition with multiple figures in an architectural context and thus demonstrate his virtuosity. But even more, this theme was the perfect vehicle for the artist to present himself as a *pictor doctus*, as it displayed his knowledge of the antique and literature. It also allowed him to draw a comparison between himself and Apelles, who in the Renaissance was considered the embodiment of the ultimate artist, but by whom no works remained.²⁵ However, there is a second layer of meaning when it comes to this subject, reaching beyond its antique origins, as not all *Calumnies* tell exactly the same story. Their iconography is related to the context of the period in which

20 Bochius and Van Der Borch 1595.

21 The portrait depicting the couple and their two eldest children was, according to the cartouche, a gift by the artist. This possibly testifies to a personal relation between De Vos and the Anselmo Family (Van Der Meer 2002, p. 11).

22 Boumans 1947, p. 193; Marnef 1996, p. 5; Van Roey 1966.

23 In a report dated 23 November 1566, Gillis and Hendrik Hoofman, Pieter Panhuys and Christoffel Plantijn are listed as '*calvinistes les plus pervers*' (Van Der Essen 1914, p. 165, 221).

24 Van Roey lists De Vos as one of the eight wealthy painters in Antwerp at the time of the Fall of Antwerp (Van Roey 1966, p. 112).

25 For instance, Rubens was often called 'The Apelles of his century': this compliment is engraved above his tombstone in St James's Church in Antwerp. Giotto, Jan van Eyck, Caravaggio, Massys and others received the same compliment by being compared to the Greek painter (Winner 1957).



[Fig. 3]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Suspicion. X067870L.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Experientia*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 34.3 × 19.4 cm (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, inv. 69). B079981.



[Fig. 4]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Calumny. X067870L.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Potestas*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 34.3 × 19.4 cm (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, inv. 57). B085566.



[Fig. 5]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Deceit. X067870L.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Infestis Spera*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 33.8 × 20.8 cm (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, inv. 20). B085640.



[Fig. 6]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Repentance. X067870L.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Justitia & Benignitas*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 33.7 × 21 cm (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, inv. 38). B085655.



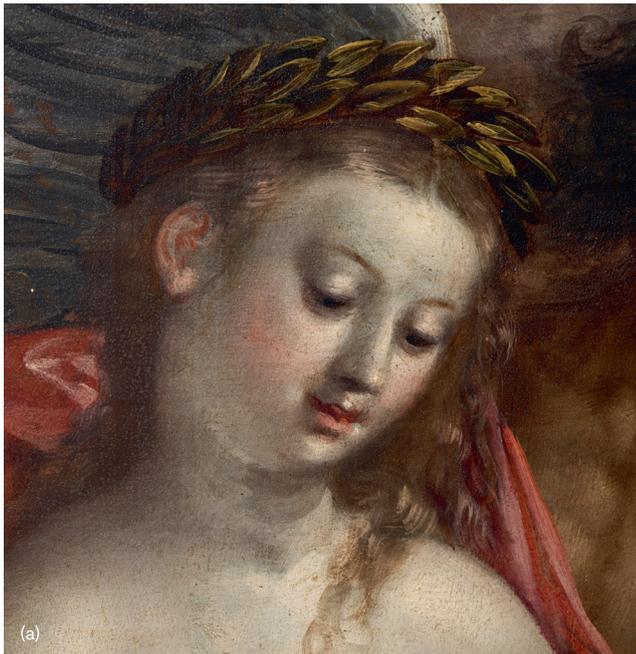
[Fig. 7]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Truth. X067870I.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Veritas*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 32.8 × 12.7 cm (Antwerp, Platin-Moretus Museum, inv. 33). B085660.



[Fig. 8]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), King. X067870I.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Orpheus*, c. 1594, pen and bistre drawing,
 34.5 × 20.3 cm (Antwerp, Platin-Moretus Museum, inv. 61). B085002.



[Fig. 9]

- (a) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail), Truth. X067846.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Altarpiece of the Guild of the Old Arbalest* (detail),
 1590, exterior right wing (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone
 Kunsten Antwerpen, inv. 90193).



◀ [Fig. 10]

Maarten de Vos, *Antonius Anselmus, his wife Joanna Hooftmans and their children Gillis and Joanna*, 1577, oil on panel, 103 × 166 cm (Brussels, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten België / Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, inv. 3689). © RMFAB, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns – Art Photography.

◀ [Fig. 11]

Maarten de Vos, *Tribunal of the Brabant Mint in Antwerp*, 1594, oil on panel, 157 × 215 cm (Antwerp, Rockoxhuis, inv. 77.4). © KBC Bank, Antwerpen, Snijders & Rockoxhuis.

they were made. Although built on the same foundation, they are personalized works whereby the interpretation is linked to the religious or political beliefs of their commissioner or maker.

From an analysis of various depictions of the theme, it can be concluded that this subject can convey different messages, such as a moral critique of the courts, the judicial system or religion.²⁶ De Vos's choice of the *Calumny of Apelles* as subject matter, its careful rendition and the large size of the painting may suggest that it was destined for a public space such as a courthouse. De Vos was known to take on such commissions, an example being the *Tribunal of the Brabant Mint in Antwerp* [fig. 11], which he painted in 1594 to hang in the Law Court of the Mint. As with the *Calumny*, the interpretation of the work is historically rich and complex. Although it is tempting to assume the *Calumny* was painted for such a destination, there are no records of any kind available to sustain such an assumption.

The original *Calumny* by Apelles was supposed to have shown a recounting of his personal experience and a disguised attack against the injustices that he had suffered under the hands of the court. In his text, Lucian presents the risks of slander as universal, but quickly specifies that the blunt cowardice of slander is mostly to be found at the court, for it is 'in the courts of kings and among friends of governors and princes, where envy is great, suspicions are countless, and occasions for flattery and slander are frequent'.²⁷ At this point the text becomes a broad accusation and transcends the anecdotal character of the original painting.

The usage of this theme as an attack on courts, kings and governors was frequent. The warnings are directed at the ruler but also at his entourage. However, sometimes it was the court itself that would commission a rendering of the *Calumny*. Paintings on the theme decorated the rooms of eminent and powerful personalities such as Lorenzo de' Medici, Pandolfo Petrucci, Francesco I de' Medici and Prince Pio of Capri. In 1539, Italian painter Anthony Toto (Antonio

di Nunziato d'Antonio) is said to have given a *Calumny of Apelles* to Henry VIII.²⁸

De Vos leaves no doubt about the royal identity of the figure with the asinine ears. His crown and luxurious cloak with an ermine trim accentuate his royal status. His body language, as well as that of the surrounding figures, immediately reveals his power to condemn. It is reminiscent of medieval iconography of the ruler or judge. During the sixteenth century, justice scenes were often found in courtrooms to serve as *exempla iustitiae*. In that context, the popularity of the *Calumny* to convey a moral critique of the judicial system in the north is not surprising. In *Calumnies* designed to decorate courthouses as a warning to all parties in the legal process, figures were often added. Error, Poena (Punishment) and Fastinatio (Hastiness) were added to the composition for the Rathaus in Nuremberg, after a design by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). These figures were labelled 'eyl-acceleratio' (Hastiness), 'irthum-error' (Error), and 'straf-pena' (Punishment), alluding to the danger of a rushed judgement and sentencing without a proper defence by the accused. The *Calumny* as a justice scene serves as an *exemplum contrarium*, warning all parties of the dangers of slander, hastiness and biased judgement.

In the sixteenth century, the northern regions attached great value to safeguarding the right to a legal defence. Within this context, to portray the act of whispering into the judge's ear implies a judgement tainted with bias. Furthermore, De Vos's choice to depict Innocence as a child calls attention to the duality of the injustice, his young age making it physically and verbally impossible for him to defend himself and to have committed a prosecutable crime in the first place. These details simplify the complex motifs of the painting, emphasizing the judicial elements in the composition and making its notions accessible to an uneducated audience.

Two striking details that are unique to De Vos's composition might have resonated in the same way with the viewer at the time. It is to wonder whether their presence implies a critique of sorts. With the figure of Repentance, De Vos introduces in an otherwise allegorical and fantastical scene a contemporary, realistic and religious element. Although Lucian's text merely mentions the colour of her dress, De Vos depicts her in a sixteenth-century religious habit, possibly of the Augustinian order, which played an important role in the diffusion of Lutheran ideas. Martin Luther himself was an Augustinian monk. De Vos also further enhances her religious role by folding her hands in prayer.

²⁶ Massing 1990, p. 153-169.

²⁷ Lucianus Samosatensis 1913, p. 361-363.

²⁸ Massing 1990, p. 107-108.

With even more subtlety, De Vos equips Envy with a short armour under his tatters. Although unidentifiable as a specific armour, it clearly alludes to the military. Are we to use these added religious and military elements as clues to decipher an underlying critique of the religious or socio-political context of the period, uttered under the breath of the maker or commissioner of the painting?

Iconographic oddities and socio-political context

The religious disputes that marked the Southern Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century and were at the root of the debate about images affected many artists. To take a stand without putting their lives at risk they used a visual language of their own, one that was often secretive and strategically ambiguous in the interpretation of its message.²⁹

Through the recurrent use of a set of different subjects and motifs, sometimes with a clear reformist undertone, they continued to issue an artistic output and took part in the debate. Beleaguered, chained and ultimately freed young women, such as the incarnations of Truth or Patience, as well as Andromeda, the Princess of Silcha or even Susanna attacked by the Elders, were very popular themes in art. Not only were they pleasant to look at; for those on both sides of the religious spectrum the image of the woman as the victim of a threat could be used as the embodiment of their version of 'the true faith'. Even bolder parallels were drawn between the Spanish authorities and figures from the Bible, such as Nebuchadnezzar and Philip II, and Saint George slaying the dragon and Alexander Farnese, who attacked the city of Antwerp in the implementation of pro-Catholic doctrine.

De Vos was one of those engaged artists who through their art formulated an often subtle and disguised critique of the Spanish Catholic establishment. It is mainly in his prints that he expressed his views on political matters affecting him, his friends, his profession and his city. In designs for prints such as *Patience in times of Tyranny*, *Holofernes before Nebuchadnezzar* and *Persecution of the Followers of Christ*, De Vos revealed his views with understated finesse and sophisticated subtlety. The right-hand part of the *Persecution* probably served as model for the right-hand part of the *Calumny* [fig. 12].

Although the *Calumny of Apelles* is a rare theme in the Netherlands and is not found in a propagandistic context, many of its principal characters are used abundantly as such. The figure of Time, for example, has often been depicted as the liberator of a chained Patience, True Faith or Truth. A painting attributed to

the Lutheran artist Gillis Mostaert (1528-1598) explicitly links Veritas Filia Temporis to the contemporary socio-political context.³⁰ Veritas, holding a codex in her hand, is being held down by a figure wearing a cardinal's cap and a figure wearing a soldier's helmet. The message that the painting conveys could not be clearer: Spain and the Catholic Church are holding down Truth with great force.³¹ In a similar way, the personifications of Envy, Deceit or Ignorance are found countless times suppressing Patience, Truth or Belgica, or surrounding and advising Alva.

Approaching the *Calumny of Apelles* by De Vos from this perspective, the king could be interpreted as incarnating the wealthy Spanish Catholic power. De Vos puts a strong emphasis on the riches of the king. The weight given to the negative connotations of luxury is reinforced by the contrast between the naked and pure Truth and the richly adorned Calumny. The covering up of Calumny's cleavage with crystals and pearls sometime after the completion of the painting (see below) is more likely to have been a reinforcement of the iconographic motif than a decency issue. Calumny could be seen as the rich and greedy Roman Catholic Church in contrast to Truth as 'the true faith'. Poor Envy could be interpreted as the wronged Spanish soldiers, whose pillaging erupted after their wages were not paid due to the Spanish bankruptcy. In this regard the *Calumny* could be a disguised critique on the contemporary socio-political situation, but Time bringing forward Truth also conveys a message of hope and could be a plea for peace, which would prevail in the end.

Technical study: a possible change of format

The technical examination and scientific analysis of the *Calumny of Apelles* reveals a wealth of information about the painting techniques and artistic materials that De Vos used towards the end of his life. The study also goes some way to solving the mystery of the peculiar appearance of the uppermost plank. Indeed, the unusual thickness of this board in relation to the others, the large swathe of overpaint at its junction with the board below, and the somewhat clumsy brushwork raises doubts as to its contemporaneity. Given that a compressed isocephalic composition is a distinct possibility in De Vos's work,³² the hypothesis of a change of format was one of the key questions investigated during this examination.

²⁹ Jonckheere 2012, p. 44-79.

³⁰ Miedema 2005.

³¹ Jonckheere 2012, p. 70.

³² In his early as well as his late oeuvre, works with similar proportions as the *Calumny* (if considering its dimensions without the upper plank: 85.5 × 180.1 cm), both on canvas and on panel, can be found occasionally: for example, *Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well*, 1562, oil on canvas, 96.8 × 199.5 cm, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, and *Christ Blessing the Children*, c. 1590, oil on panel, 124 × 259.5 cm, La Ferté-Milon, St Nicholas Church.



[Fig. 12]

- (a) Hieronymus Wierix, engraving (detail) after a design by Maarten de Vos, *Persecution of the Followers of Christ*, c. 1582-1583 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, inv. 2490AA). © PESSCA 2490AA.
 (b) Maarten de Vos, *Calumny of Apelles* (detail). X0678701.

— Panel support

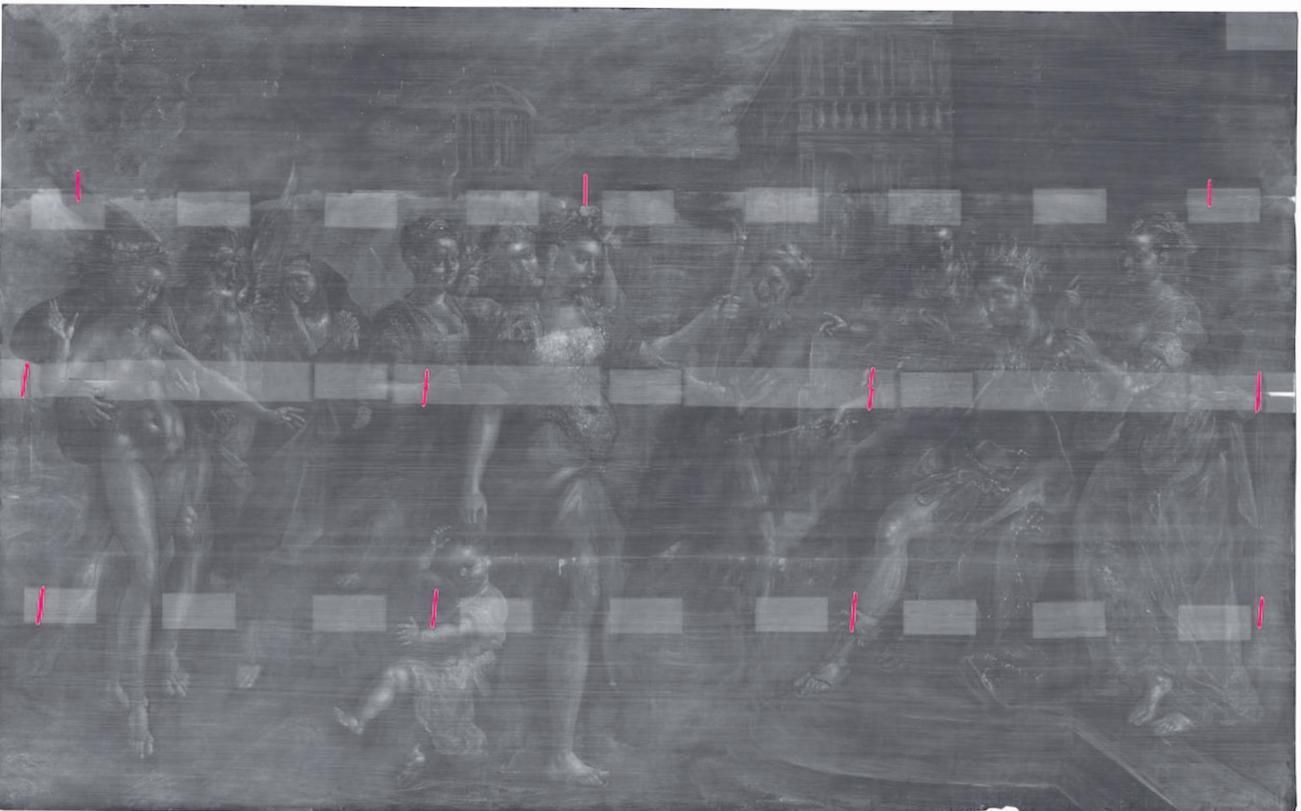
The *Calumny* is painted on an oak panel made up of four radially cut, horizontally aligned planks of uneven thickness, from 0.5 cm to 1.3 cm [fig. 13]. The boards are butt-joined with wooden dowels [fig. 14]. The reverse has not been thinned and still displays tool marks from the original manufacture of the panel [fig. 13]. On the front, saw marks are visible on the second plank down from the top.

The top plank presents a series of anomalies. It is considerably thicker than the one it rests on and is of a slightly lower quality cut of wood than the others, which are made from perfect quarter-sawn boards. But the join is the most incongruous feature. While the other planks are assembled with traditional butt joints, the uppermost join is reinforced by a triangular wooden insert [fig. 15]. This was presumably applied to compensate for the lack of thickness in the second plank and to increase the bonding surface. Furthermore,

whereas most of the dowels seem to follow a certain order, the ones bridging the upper join are less numerous, smaller and more staggered [fig. 14].

In terms of condition, the uppermost plank also reveals notable differences. The X-radiograph uncovers woodworm damage, partly filled by a radiopaque putty, in this board only [fig. 16]. Since there are no wormholes on the reverse side of the panel, it is likely that the insect damage was already present on the front side and filled with a lead white-based material before priming.³³

33 The filling of imperfections such as knots, saw marks or worm damage in panels prior to priming has been observed in Flemish panel painting from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Examples include Jan and Hubert van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*, 1432 (Ghent, St Bavo Cathedral) and various panels by Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Peter Paul Rubens (see Currie and Allart 2012, 3, p. 738-739 and notes 40-43).

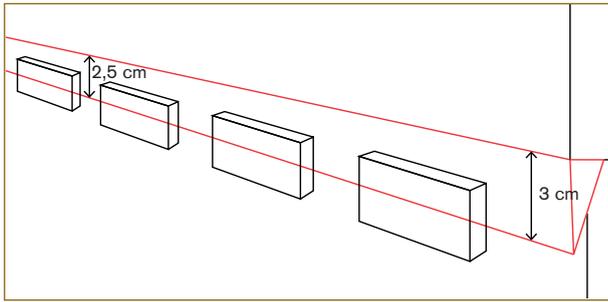


[Fig. 13]

Reverse of the panel in raking light. The blocks supporting the joints were added during a former intervention. X067833.

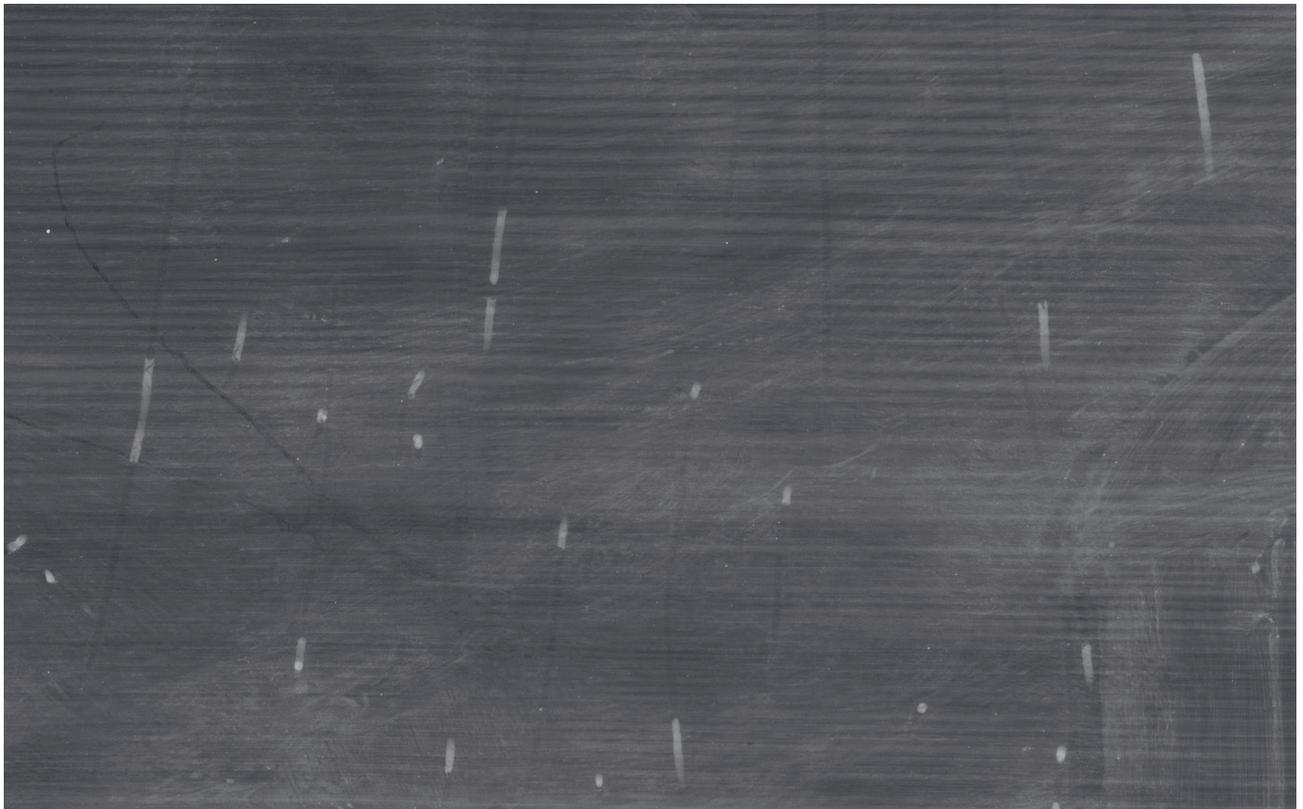
[Fig. 14]

X-radiograph, showing location of the dowels. RXR000579.



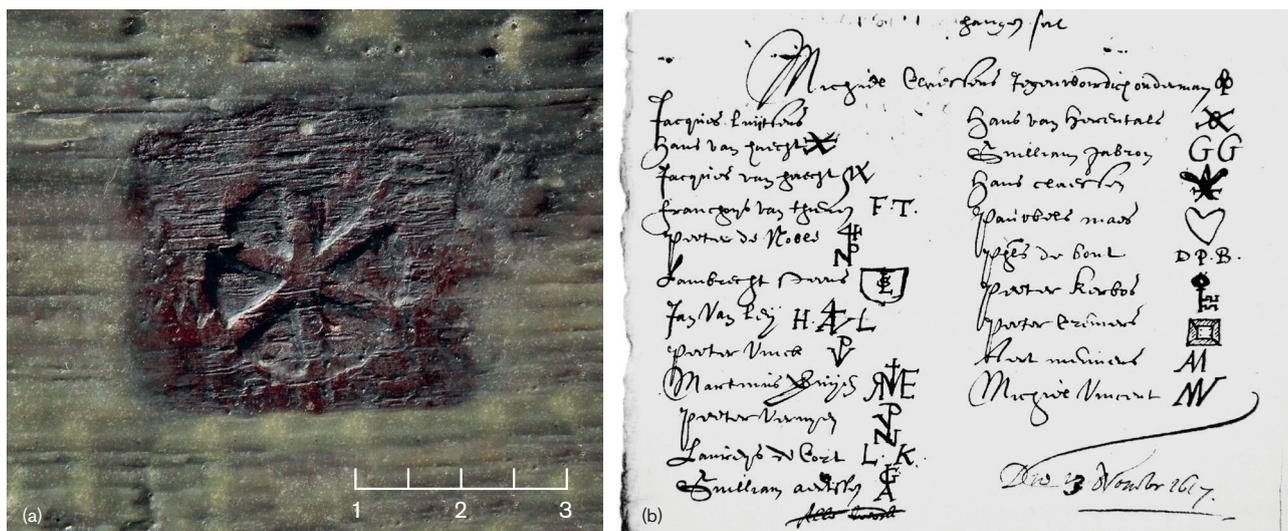
[Fig. 15]

Reconstruction of the triangular insert reinforcing the top joint. Working document (Gaëlle Pentier).



[Fig. 16]

X-radiograph detail of the top plank, revealing woodworm channels; some of these are partially filled with a radiopaque material. RXR000579.



[Fig. 17]

- (a) Detail of the panel-maker's personal mark. Working document (Gaëlle Pentier).
 (b) List of panel-makers' personal marks, 13 November 1617 (Antwerp City Archives, 4336; Van Damme 1990, fig. 9).

As previously mentioned, the reverse of the panel is marked with the panel-maker's symbol [fig. 17 a]. This six-pointed star, or three cross-bars forming a circle, measures 18 mm in diameter and has been struck cold to the centre left, using a branding iron. The mark is not accompanied by a guild or city brand. It is probably that of art dealer and panel-maker Hans van Haecht (born 1557, active 1589–c. 1621).³⁴ A comparable symbol appears beside his name in a 1617 list of Antwerp panel-makers, discovered in the Antwerp City Archives by Jan van Damme [fig. 17 b].³⁵

Van Haecht was a joiner and became a master of the Guild of St Luke in 1589. In 1610, he made the panels for the *Erection of the Cross* triptych by Rubens, which was to decorate the High Altar of the St Walburga Church in Antwerp. He also made the wings and the frame for the *Descent from the Cross* triptych, painted by Rubens for the Musketeers guild.³⁶ If the panel mark on the *Calumny* is indeed that of Van Haecht, it narrows down the possible period of execution of the painting. Van Haecht would probably have started to mark his panels after he became a master of the guild in 1589; De Vos died in 1603. The *Calumny of Apelles* was therefore most likely executed between these dates.

Six-pointed stars or cross-bars have been found stamped into the reverse sides of other panels from the same or slightly later period, including paintings

by Pieter Brueghel the Younger³⁷ and Henry van Gorp.³⁸ Like the *Calumny of Apelles*, none of these marks is accompanied by the Antwerp brand. Since marking with the panel-maker's stamp and branding by the dean of the guild only became obligatory from 13 November 1617, it is likely that these panels were produced before this date.

— Preparatory layers

The panel has been prepared with a white chalk ground, which is visible in two cross-sections taken from each of the two uppermost planks [fig. 18].³⁹ The ground is surmounted in the main body of the panel by a grey *imprimatura*. This tinted layer is observed in the cross-section from the second plank from the top and can be visualized as dark, streaky, multi-directional strokes in the infrared reflectogram [fig. 20, 21 and 26]. It is notable that no such *imprimatura* is discernible in the top plank, either in the cross-section or in the infrared image. The semi-transparent area

³⁴ Van Damme 1990, p. 194–196.

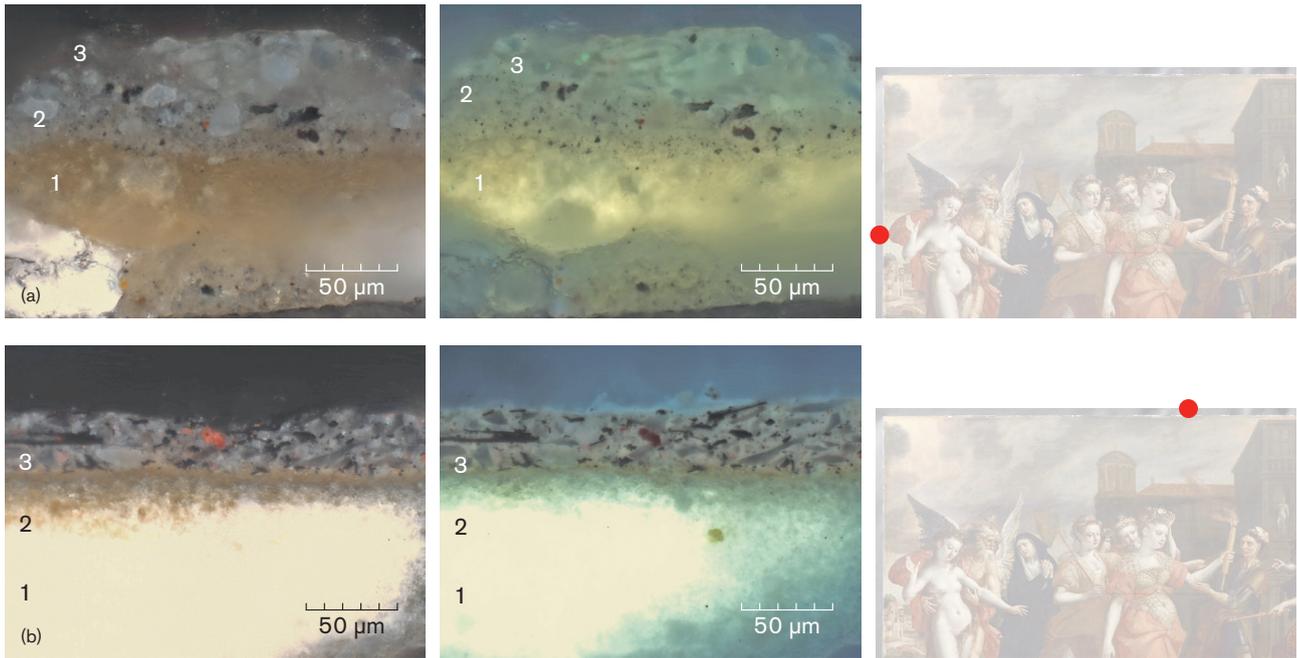
³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 195, fig. 9.

³⁶ Van den Nieuwenhuizen 1962, p. 42–43.

³⁷ Three panel paintings by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564–1637/38) carry a similar, but smaller, mark to that on the *Calumny*: Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Sibiu, Muzeul National Brukenenthal, 115.2 × 163.7 cm, signed 'PBRVEGEL'; not dated (see Currie and Allart 2012, p. 735, fig. 515, and notes 34–35 and 51); Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*, National Gallery of Denmark, 121.2 × 162.7 cm, signed 'PBRVEGHEL'; not dated (mark noted by Jørgen Wadum and we thank him for bringing it to our attention); Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Two Peasants binding Faggots*, Birmingham, Barber Institute, 36.2 × 27.3 cm, not signed or dated (mark noted during technical examination by Christina Currie in collaboration with Ruth Bubb, 19–22 May 2014).

³⁸ A mark of a similar size (20 mm) to that on the *Calumny* (18 mm) was observed on a *Dutch Landscape* by Henry van Gorp (Schuster-Gawtowska 1989, p. 252).

³⁹ Although no medium analysis was carried out, it is likely that the ground is glue-based.



[Fig. 18 a]

Cross-section of the sky paint from the second plank from the top. Left: visible light; right: ultraviolet fluorescence (×500 magnification). Working document (Steven Saverwyns).
 1 Ground: chalk-gluce.
 2 Grey *imprimatura*: lead white, carbon-based black, vermilion, earth pigment.
 3 Paint layer: smalt, lead white.

[Fig. 18 b]

Cross-section of the sky paint from the top plank. Left: visible light; right: ultraviolet fluorescence (×500 magnification). Working document (Steven Saverwyns).
 1 Ground: chalk-gluce.
 2 Isolation layer or penetration of the paint binder into the ground layer.
 3 Paint layer: smalt, lead white, carbon-based black, vermilion.

below the paint layer in the cross-section from the top plank may be due to the presence of a colourless isolation layer, but the translucent effect could also be due to paint medium seeping into the porous ground.

There are numerous scratches in the ground layer, which are easily visible in infrared reflectography and can sometimes be made out through the paint with the naked eye [fig. 19]. These probably result from smoothing down the dry ground with a metal scraper, which may have had tiny nicks in it. These scratches are not linked to the brushwork of the *imprimatura*. They are absent from the top plank, suggesting that it was not primed at the same time as the rest and was smoothed down with another tool or material.

— The transfer of the design to panel

The design has been brushed on loosely using a dark, infrared-absorbing paint. It establishes the main layout of the figures, drapery folds and landscape motifs [fig. 20–22]. These initial markings are sometimes impossible to distinguish from later reinforcements of outlines, as in Innocence’s arms [fig. 21].

The figural composition, most likely developed through independent studies of the various personifications (see above) and a compositional model drawing, has not been modified significantly during execution. The few minor adjustments during painting will be discussed below.

In the uppermost plank, there is no discernible preparatory drawing or sketch.

— Paint layer

The paint layer largely respects the preliminary design. The artist worked using the time-honoured technique of reserves, laying in the background with broad swathes of paint and subsequently integrating the figures into the empty spaces [fig. 21 and 22]. He then continued to rework both the background and the figures, notably the flesh areas. He built up his light tones progressively, leaving the grey *imprimatura* visible to serve as half-shadow. He then added touches of light paint for highlights and dark glazes for shadows. Lastly, while the paint was still soft, he delicately blended dark and light areas with a brush, resulting in characteristic streaks [fig. 23].

Minimal adjustments during execution, visible in infrared, include a shift of Time’s leg to the right [fig. 22] and a shortening of a small section of his red drape. The infrared image also reveals several zones of dark underpaint in the architectural background [fig. 24]. Some of these establish shadow areas for motifs such as the column to the far right, but others cannot be explained as they do not correspond to the final composition. They may indicate columns that were abandoned during painting, perhaps relating to those in Ghisi’s engraving [fig. 2], a key visual source for De



[Fig. 19]

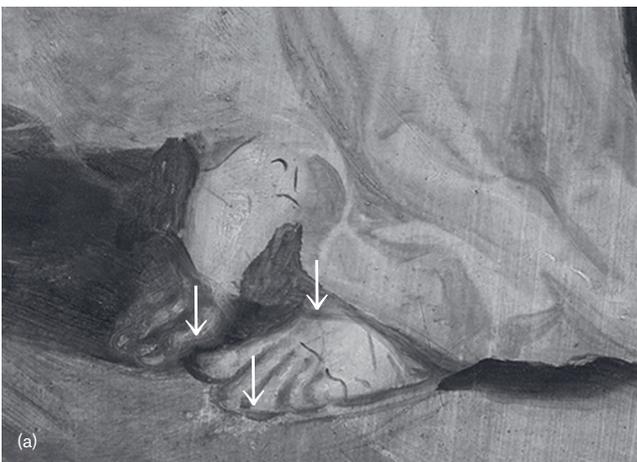
Location of scratches in the ground layer. Working document (Gaëlle Pentier).

► [Fig. 21]

Innocence, detail. Space reserved in dark background paint for the figure, IRR (a) and visible light (b). IR000826I and X067837.

► [Fig. 22]

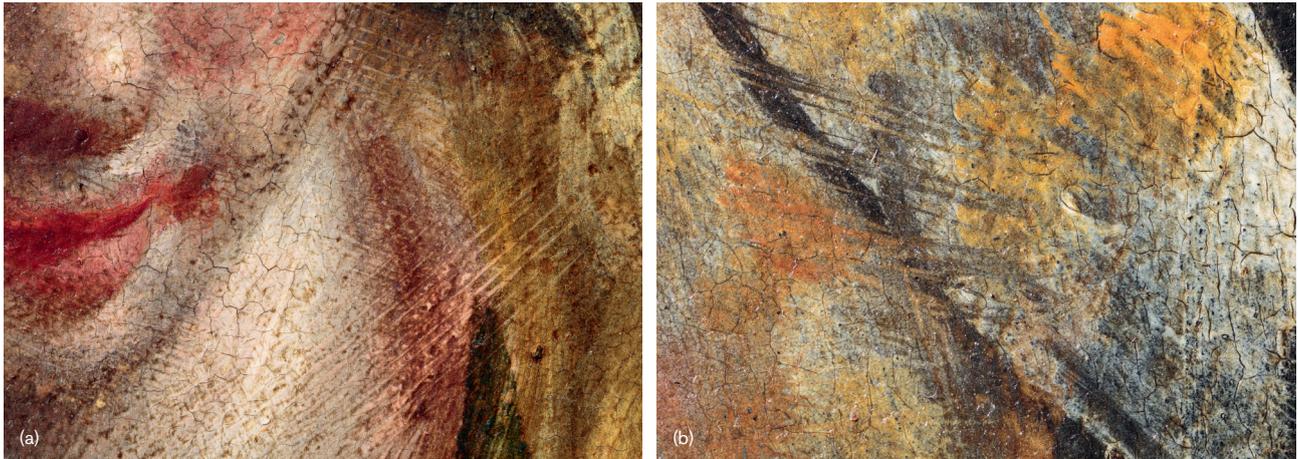
A *pentimento* is observed in the leg of Time, IRR (a) and visible light (b). IR000826I and X067836.



[Fig. 20]

Ignorance's feet. Loose underdrawing visible in places (arrows), IRR (a) and visible light (b). IR000826I and X067838.





[Fig. 23]

(a) Suspicion, detail of mouth and shoulder. X070326I.
 (b) Time, detail of wing to the right. X070330I.



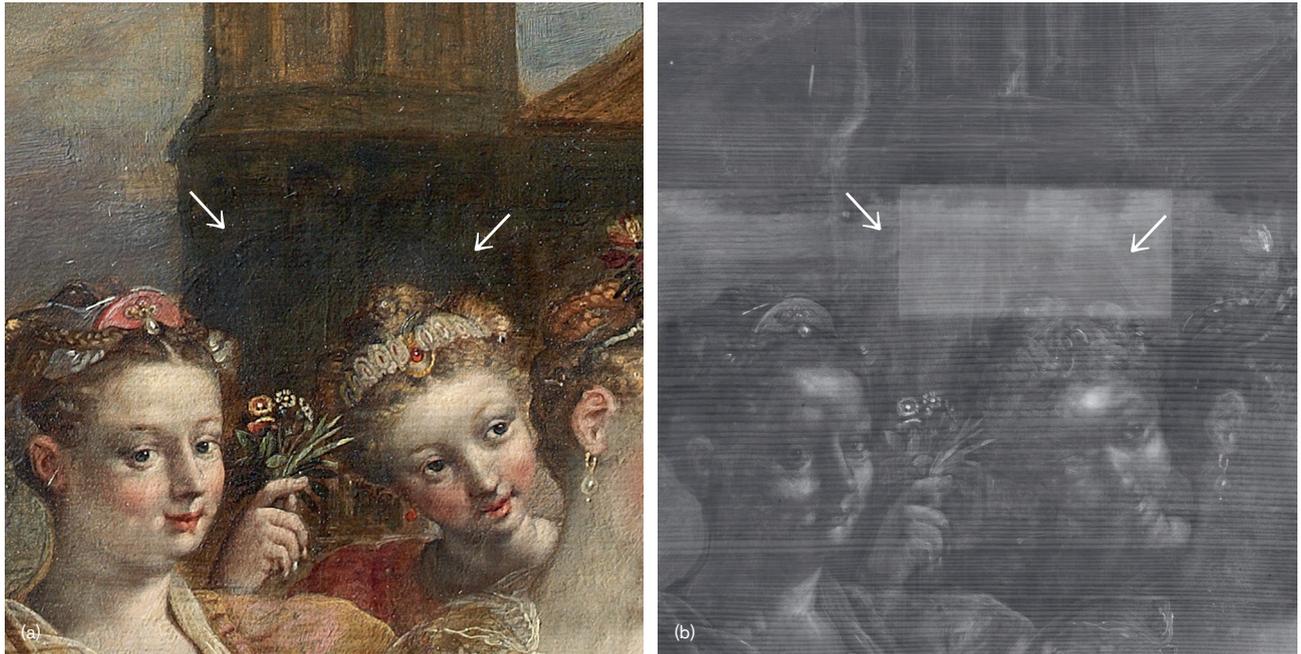
[Fig. 24]

Infrared reflectogram. IR000826I.

Vos's *Calumny*. There also appears to be an abandoned arch behind Deceit [fig. 25]. Finally, in the X-radiograph and infrared image, it is possible to make out curved lines coming together at Suspicion's head [fig. 26]. These may relate to the draped curtain in the canopy above the king's throne in Ghisi's print.

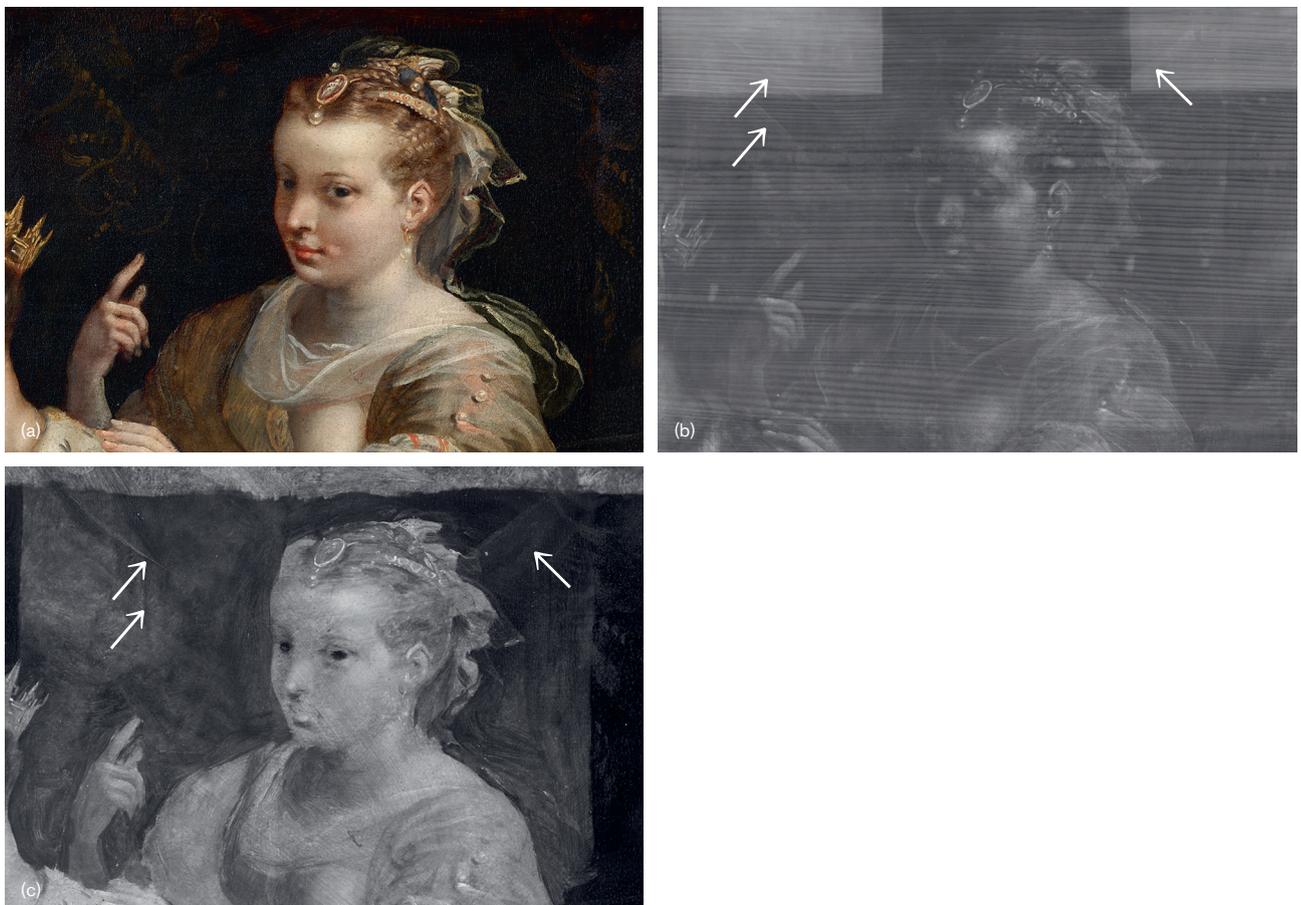
Certain hands have been painted in ruddy, reddish-pink hues, contrasting sharply with the smooth, creamy white flesh tones of the bodies. The brush-

work in these hands also seem somewhat cruder and less polished in execution than the rest. This could be due to a search for realism, but the effect is rather odd. In the case of Treachery, the left hand seems slightly separated from the body [fig. 27]. It may suggest that these hands were painted in a second phase and possibly by a collaborator. Another somewhat disturbing observation is that there are a few small errors in the choice of colour for the final corrections of certain draperies, which confuse the understanding of depth and space [fig. 28].



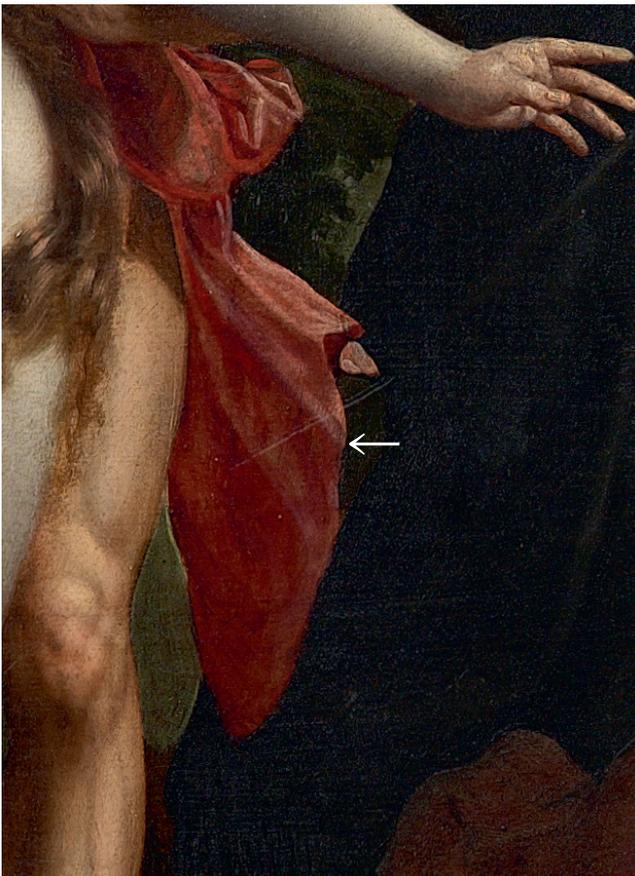
[Fig. 25]

A possible abandoned arch can be made out in raking light (a) and in X-radiography (b). X067832 and RXR000579.



[Fig. 26]

Suspicion, detail of head. A draped curtain was foreseen and then dropped during painting. Visible light (a); x-radiography (b); infrared reflectography (c). X067843, RXR000579 and IR000826I.



[Fig. 27]

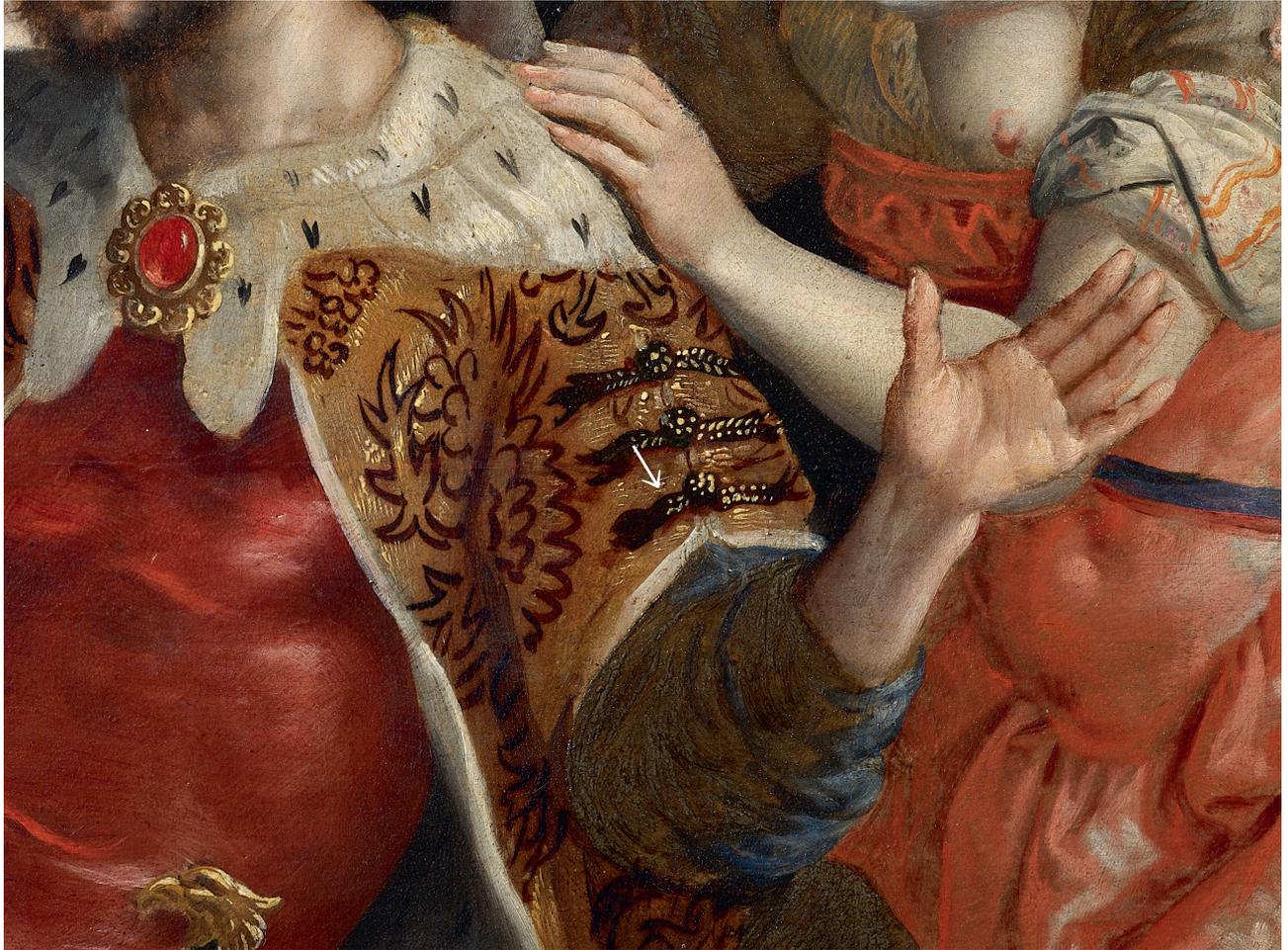
Treachery, detail of hand. There is a clear break in the wrist (arrow). X067859.

[Fig. 28]

Detail, error in placement of background colour. Working document (Gaëlle Pentier).

[Fig. 29]

Detail, king's left sleeve in raking light. XRF analysis confirmed the presence of smalt in both the discoloured part of the fabric and in the preserved blue area. X067867.



— Pigments and alterations in colour

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis was carried out on the main zones of colour and the two cross-sections from the sky were analysed for their pigments. Lead white was identified in all areas, which would have been added to paint mixtures to obtain the diverse nuances of tone. Red areas were found to be rich in vermilion and a probable earth pigment; visually, a rich transparent red also suggests the presence of red lake but lakes are not possible to detect with XRF.

Many different zones contain smalt, which goes some way to explaining the chromatic evolution of the painting over time. Smalt, a cobalt glass pigment that was commonly used by artists as a cheap alternative to ultramarine and azurite in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, often loses its blue hue on ageing.⁴⁰ Red tones now dominate the composition, and this is partially due to the fading of smalt. The pigment is present in the king's sleeves, which should originally have been blue [fig. 29], and is also identi-

[Fig. 30]

Detail, king's robe. Tin and lead were detected in XRF in the golden threads of the brocade (arrow), suggesting the presence of lead-tin yellow. X067843.

fied in the skirts of Deceit and Suspicion. In the case of Suspicion, the patchy, blue-tinged, pale appearance of the skirt is probably due to the fading of smalt [fig. 3 a]. Smalt has also been used in the sky, which may therefore appear less vivid than at the outset. A lighter blue patch in the king's sleeves, however, still retains a blue hue, despite containing smalt [fig. 29]. This could be due to various factors: the presence of lead white could have impeded the degradation process,⁴¹ the origin and quality of the smalt might have been different in this area, or the blue colour could be due to the presence of an additional blue pigment such as indigo or ultramarine, which are undetectable in XRF.

Highlights from the golden threads of the brocade on the king's cape appear radiopaque in X-radiography, suggesting the presence of a lead-based pigment

⁴⁰ On smalt and its tendency to fade, see Muhlethaler and Thissen 1993, Robinet, Spring and Pagès-Camagna 2011, Stege 2004 and Spring, Higgitt and Saunders 2005.

⁴¹ Spring, Higgitt and Saunders 2005.



[Fig. 31]

Detail, orange-red dress of Calumny. Lead soap protrusions are visible over the entire dress. X0703311.

[fig. 30].⁴² XRF analysis identified the elements copper, lead and tin. The presence of lead and tin could indicate the presence of lead-tin yellow. The copper could derive from the green garment underneath. De Vos might have purchased his pigments from Merten Alleyns (registered in the guild archives in 1561 as Merten van Halewyn), the husband of his sister Barbara and a pigment dealer or *'verfvercoopere'*.⁴³

Another alteration, found in the vermilion-based orange-red dress of Calumny, is caused by the formation of lead soaps over time.⁴⁴ Tiny protrusions typical of such a phenomenon are noticeable on the surface of the paint [fig. 31]. Lead soaps develop and push through to the surface of the paint as part of a chemical ageing process. In this case, it is probably due to the presence of minium (red lead) or lead white.

XRF analysis revealed a similar chemical composition between the two upper planks. Furthermore, SEM-EDX analysis of the two cross-sections of sky paint, one from the uppermost plank and the other from the second plank down, identified smalt in both, as well as lead white. The presence of smalt establishes that the uppermost plank is not a modern addition, as smalt fell out of use after the mid-eighteenth century. Furthermore, no typically nineteenth-century pigments were present in the sample.

— An early overpaint: Calumny's bodice

Calumny's bodice, whose thick, granular surface appearance immediately catches the eye, was shown in X-radiography and raking light to conceal another neckline [fig. 32]. The *décolletage* was originally squarer and lower, revealing her cleavage.

The added bodice has its own set of cracks, witness to its considerable age. However, the cracks are not deep and are clearly distinguishable from the orig-

inal age crack network, suggesting that a significant number of years passed between the execution of the painting and the addition of the new bodice. Furthermore, the brushwork in the later bodice is crude in comparison to that in the other draperies. This modification cannot therefore be attributable to De Vos. Nonetheless, XRF analysis also detected the presence of Naples yellow in the bodice, attesting to a relatively early execution. Naples yellow was mainly used between 1750 and 1850, after which time it was gradually replaced by chrome yellow and cadmium yellow.⁴⁵

The bodice also contains bright particles in the ochre-coloured areas [fig. 33]. XRF analysis detected copper and zinc, which could suggest that bronze powder was introduced into the paint mixture for decorative effect. The area also suffers from soap formation, as in the main body of the red dress.

It might be initially assumed that the reason for covering up the bust might be due to a desire for a more modest appearance. But since several other figures display overt nudity, this is an unlikely explanation. Indeed, as suggested above, the addition was likely made with the intention of keeping the focus of the viewer on this key figure and to make her stand out more clearly. The added gems and pearls reinforce the visual and iconographic contrast between the Calumny and the naked Truth. The iconographic connotation of luxury as a great evil is a consistent element in De Vos's oeuvre.

— The question of the top plank

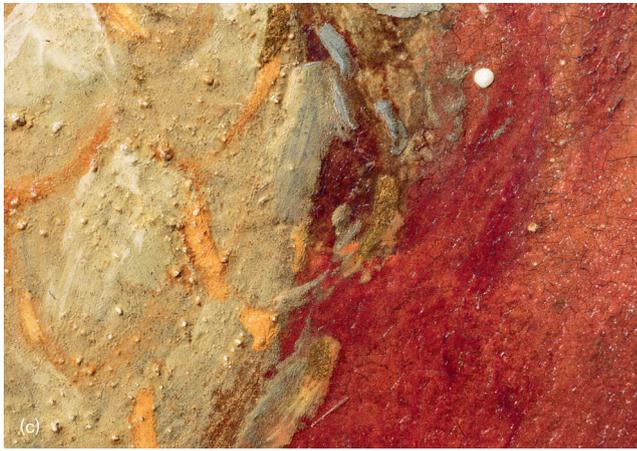
It has become increasingly clear that the top plank is intrinsically different from the rest of the panel in several important ways. It is of lower quality oak and has been affected by woodworm, unlike the rest. It is joined to the panel in an atypical manner, with an added inlay at the surface of the join and fewer, smaller dowels. The ground has been smoothed down differ-

⁴² The gold threads were carefully examined and there was nothing observed to suggest that they represent later additions.

⁴³ Rombouts and Van Lerijs 1872, p. 224.

⁴⁴ On lead soaps in painting, see Noble, Boon and Wadum 2002, Centeno and Mahon 2009, and Keune and Boon 2007.

⁴⁵ Eastaugh *et al.* 2008, p. 227.



[Fig. 32]

Detail of Calumny's added bodice in raking light (a) and in X-radiography (b). X067879I and RXR000579.

Close-up detail of transition between the bodice and original paint of the red dress (c). X070327I.



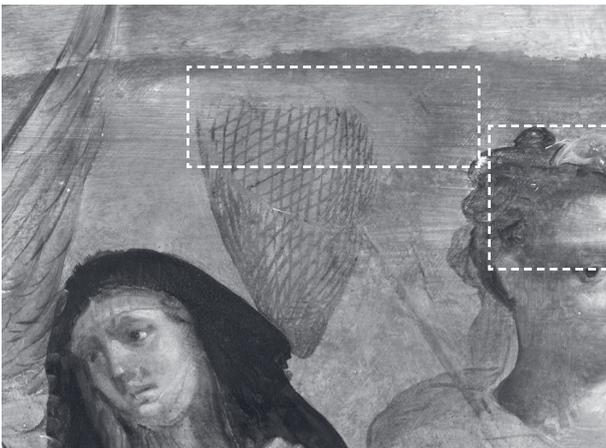
[Fig. 33]

Detail, bodice, with gold-coloured particles in the paint layer. X070328I.



[Fig. 34]

Detail, top two planks in infrared (a) and X-radiography (b), join marked in red. The demarcation line falls just below the join and follows the application of the new ground over the lower plank. The upper parts of Time's wings are later extensions. IRR000826I and RXR000579.



[Fig. 35]

Detail, showing worn areas adjacent to the demarcation line between the two upper planks, IRR. IRR000826I.

ently to the other planks, and there is no apparent *imprimatura*. The paint on the top plank is also noticeably thinner than that on the rest of the panel and there is a marked change in surface level. The transition between the top plank and the rest is noticeable in X-radiography, infrared, raking light and ultraviolet fluorescence [fig. 34 and 36].

The demarcation line between the two top planks undulates just below the actual join. The streaky *imprimatura* in the main body of the panel also stops abruptly at this point [fig. 34]. Furthermore, infrared reveals that the upper part of the net and Deceit's bun – both just below the demarcation line – seem deliberately abraded [fig. 35]. It seems likely that the uppermost part of the painted composition on the plank second from top was significantly sanded down, probably to facilitate the addition of the top plank. Fresh ground material from the newly applied top plank would then have been applied over the join and smoothed down to form a seamless junction with the rest of the panel. The upper sky would then have been painted and the tips of Time's wings extended onto the top plank [fig. 34].

In terms of style, the top plank does not manifest the dexterous touch of De Vos. The architectural elements and strange shell-like form above the king betray weaknesses in handling and brushwork. Furthermore, the shell motif occupies the space of the tasselled square canopy in Ghisi's print, which suggests that the addition was made without reference to the main visual source behind De Vos's composition.

Based on these observations, the uppermost plank cannot be contemporary to the rest of the panel. However, the presence of smalt in the sky paint indicates that the change in format must have been made



[Fig. 36]

Ultraviolet fluorescence photograph. X068872L.

relatively early, either in the seventeenth or first half of the eighteenth century. What might have prompted the addition of the top plank is open to interpretation. It could have been to replace a defective plank. More likely, it represents a change in taste. De Vos's compressed, bas-relief style composition would have seemed old-fashioned by the mid-seventeenth century. The addition of another plank gives the composition a more balanced format, with more space to set off the figures.

Although the painting is in generally excellent condition, swathes of later overpaint along and around the uppermost join are clearly visible under ultraviolet fluorescence, and appear to have been applied on top of the present varnish layer [fig. 36]. It seems likely that the paint layers of the top two planks have aged differently and that the overpaint was applied during the last restoration campaign to smooth over any differences in tone or hue.

Conclusion

Maarten de Vos's rediscovered *Calumny of Apelles* is a faithful rendition of the Greek rhetorician Lucian's text, and as such demonstrated his erudition and intimate knowledge of the classical subject. His principal visual source was most likely Giorgio Ghisi's engraving on the same theme after a painting by Luca Penni. That the painting is most likely from De Vos's later oeuvre is attested by the presence of a panel-maker's mark on the reverse of the panel, identified here as that of Hans van Haecht, who registered at the guild of Antwerp in 1589. Stylistic resemblances between the characters in the *Calumny* and those in De Vos's series of preparatory drawings for the Joyous Entry of Archduke Ernest of Austria in 1594 also support the hypothesis of a late dating, probably within the last nine years of the artist's life. Although the painting's early provenance is unknown, its moralizing subject matter and large format suggest that it may have originally been commissioned for a public space such as a courthouse.

The technical study reveals that the painting has been carried out on a high-quality oak support, with a chalk ground and grey-tinted *imprimatura* typical of its period. The design has been loosely sketched on in a fluid medium and largely followed during painting, the artist using the traditional technique of leaving reserves in the background for the motifs still to be painted. Certain late touches, such as a few less adroitly painted hands and illogical colour corrections, may

suggest the collaboration of studio hands, perhaps after the death of De Vos.

The pigments identified in the *Calumny* are typical of those of the late sixteenth century. The artist's abundant use of the blue pigment smalt explains why certain blue and purple draperies have lost their colour and appear nebulous and patchy.

The technical examination also brought to light two major modifications that were carried out after the painting was complete. One of these is the addition of a jewelled bodice to the main protagonist, Calumny. This may have been with the intention of emphasizing her worldly qualities in contrast to Truth, whose nakedness embodies her purity. The second was the addition of the top plank, transforming the old-fashioned, isocephalic composition into a more modern arrangement with breathing space above the figures. The addition of the bodice was most likely made between 1750 and 1850, given the presence of Naples yellow. The detection of smalt in the top plank suggests that it may have been added even earlier, as the pigment fell out of use in the mid-eighteenth century.

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Résumé – Samenvatting – Abstract

FR :: La *Calomnie d'Apelle* de Maarten de Vos est analysée d'un point de vue historique, iconographique et technique. Sa fortune critique est explorée, en particulier le texte du rhétoricien grec Lucien de Samosate, ainsi qu'une gravure de Giorgio Ghisi sur le même thème. La présence de la marque du fabricant de panneaux Hans van Haecht permet de dater la réalisation de l'œuvre au plus tôt en 1589, tandis que les similitudes stylistiques avec les dessins préparatoires de De Vos réalisés pour la *Joyeuse entrée de l'archiduc Ernest à Anvers* en 1594 suggèrent une datation tardive, probablement dans les neuf dernières années de la vie de l'artiste. L'étude technique met en lumière les techniques et les matériaux d'origine utilisés pour la fabrication du panneau et pour l'application de l'enduit et des couches picturales : les pigments sont pour la plupart typiques de la fin du XVI^e siècle. Le smalt a été abondamment utilisé, entraînant l'affaiblissement de la couleur de certaines draperies. L'étude dévoile également deux modifications majeures postérieures à l'achèvement de l'œuvre : l'ajout du corsage serti de Calomnie et celui de la planche supérieure. Le nouveau corsage luxueux de Calomnie, qui souligne ses qualités mondaines, a probablement été ajouté entre 1750 et 1850, tandis que la planche est probablement venue compléter la composition plus tôt, lui donnant une structure spatiale plus moderne.

Mots-clés : Maarten de Vos ; calomnie d'Apelle ; Giorgio Ghisi ; Hans van Haecht ; smalt.

NL :: De *Laster van Apelles* van Maarten de Vos wordt vanuit historisch, iconografisch en technisch oogpunt bestudeerd. De literaire en visuele bronnen van het werk worden uitgediept, waarbij vooral de tekst van de Griekse retoricus Lucianus en de gravure van Giorgio Ghisi over hetzelfde thema aan bod komen. Het aangebrachte merkteken van de paneelmaker Hans van Haecht geeft aan dat het werk ten vroegste uit 1589 kan dateren. Bovendien wijzen stilistische gelijkenissen met ontwerpschetsen van De Vos voor de *Blijde Intrede van aartshertog Ernst in Antwerpen* in 1594 in de richting van een late datering, wellicht in de laatste negen levensjaren van de kunstenaar. Dankzij de technische studie komen de originele technieken en materialen die bij de vervaardiging van het paneel en het aanbrengen van de grond- en verflagen zijn gebruikt, aan het licht. De pigmenten zijn grotendeels kenmerkend voor die gebruikt aan het einde van de zestiende eeuw. Er is overvloedig smalt aangewend, wat verklaart waarom bepaalde draperingen hun kleur hebben verloren. De studie legt ook twee belangrijke wijzigingen bloot die na de voltooiing van het schilderij zijn uitgevoerd: de toevoeging van een lijfje met juwelen aan het personage van de Laster en de extra plank bovenaan. Het nieuwe luxueuze lijfje van de Laster vestigde de aandacht op haar wereldse kenmerken en werd hoogstwaarschijnlijk toegevoegd tussen 1750 en 1850. De extra plank bovenaan werd er wellicht eerder bijgeplaatst om de compositie een modernere ruimtelijke structuur te geven.

Trefwoorden: Maarten de Vos; Laster van Apelles; Giorgio Ghisi; Hans van Haecht; smalt.

EN :: Maarten de Vos's *Calumny of Apelles* is considered from a historical, iconographical and technical point of view. Its literary and visual sources are explored, particularly in relation to the text of Lucian, the Greek rhetorician, and to Giorgio Ghisi's engraving on the same theme. The presence of Hans van Haecht's panel-maker's mark gives 1589 as an earliest possible execution date; furthermore, stylistic resemblances with preparatory drawings by De Vos for Archduke Ernest's 1594 Joyous Entry into Antwerp suggest a late dating, probably in the last nine years of the artist's life. The technical study brings to light the original techniques and materials used in the manufacture of the panel and the application of the ground and paint layers. The pigments are mostly typical of those of the late sixteenth century and include the abundant use of smalt, which explains why certain draperies have lost their colour. The study also uncovers two major modifications that were carried out after the painting was complete: the addition of Calumny's jewelled bodice and that of the top plank. Calumny's new luxurious bodice drew attention to her worldly qualities and was most likely added between 1750 and 1850, while the extra board at the top was probably added earlier, giving the composition a more modern spatial structure.

Keywords: Maarten de Vos; Calumny of Apelles; Giorgio Ghisi; Hans van Haecht; smalt.
