

Condition Report and Treatment Proposal

Object Number: 63.54
Title: The Lesson
Primary Artist/Maker: Ludolf De Jongh
Culture/Date: Dutch, 1661
Materials: oil on canvas



Purpose of Request: European Expansion Preparation

Description: Current treatment of the painting will prioritize retaining previous restoration layers, as the bulk of the inpainting and retouching remains well-matched and appropriately saturated. Full removal of the discolored varnish and associated inpainting layers will be the subject of future treatment(s). The following is proposed to prepare the painting for display in VMFA galleries:

Condition: Description:
The painting was brought to Conservation for treatment associated with the ongoing European Expansion project. It was removed from its frame and examined under normal conditions, with the aid of low magnification, and under the microscope. Digital images were made under diffuse, specular, and raking white light, and with UVA-induced visible fluorescence, infrared reflectography (1250 - 1700 nm), and X-radiography.

General description:

The painting is a vertical full-body portrait of a young blonde boy pointing to a hat and holding the paw of a spaniel (believed to be a Nederlandse Kooikerhondje), which is sitting up on its hind legs. The figure is in a fine grey and white dress accessorized with graphic vermilion ribbons. In the center right area of the background, the painting is inscribed "Aeta. 6. L. D. Jongh Fecit | A° 1661".

Auxiliary support:

The stretcher is made of five softwood members with bridle joints at the corners, which accommodate two keys each. The horizontal cross bar is connected by a mortise and tenon joints with a key on each side. Each member is 2 ½ inches wide and has a depth of ¾ inch. The members are beveled. All 10 keys are present but not secured. One small sticker label is located on the top left corner, but the blue ink is faded and illegible. The stretcher is likely not original to the painting.

Primary support:

The painting was lined using a glue paste adhesive before being acquired by the museum. Imaging with infrared reflectography and X-radiography reveals regular, small holes flush with the right edge of the painting, and about 1 inch inwards from the top, left, and bottom edges. These are likely related to the Dutch practice of preparing canvases for paintings by lacing or looming them with string onto a slightly larger wooden strainer [1]. In the X-radiograph, cusping is visible on the bottom and right edges, which appears unrelated to the loom holes. It is likely that after being painted while laced on an auxiliary support, the canvas was reattached to a more permanent support, causing the visible secondary cusping. At this point or later in the painting's lifetime, it appears to have been trimmed down. The holes appear too close to the edges of the canvas to be used for reliable tensioning. Sometime thereafter, the painting was lined and extended. About 1 inch was added to the top, left, and bottom edges, while the right edge is in line with the present auxiliary support. The lining canvas is made of fine, evenly spaced linen threads in a plain weave with 43 vertical and 36 horizontal threads. The canvas extends around ¾ to 1 inch along the back of the stretcher,

where it is adhered down and neatly cut with mitered corners. The sides of the painting are partially covered with a kraft paper tape carrier. Through the lining canvas and kraft paper tape, the support is secured to the stretcher with evenly spaced iron tacks (estimated).

The X-radiograph distinguishes that additional pieces of canvas were attached to the lining canvas along the top, left, and bottom edges of the painting. The canvas texture from the image is closely matched to the original but has a different cusping pattern. The top and bottom strips both measure approximately $28 \frac{1}{4} \times 1$ inch. The left side is extended with a $28 \frac{1}{4} \times 1$ inch strip, with an additional $8 \frac{1}{2} \times 1$ inch strip added to complete the height of the painting. The current dimensions of the original canvas are $36 \frac{3}{4} \times 27$ inches (See Appendix 1: Graphics related to canvas extension).

Preparation layer(s):

The canvas was prepared with an even layer of white gesso. The texture of the support is still visible through the ground layer.

The texture of the extended areas is similar to the original painted surface. They were likely sized and prepared with a ground layer. Supporting this, small spots which appear white in the X-radiograph indicate that a lead-white ground is penetrating the canvas in the extended sections.

The slight gaps between the canvas extensions and original painted surface were likely filled with an unknown material to hide seams.

The earliest layer of composition planning may be a layer of local underpainting to block out the figure. An underdrawing in dry media is precisely applied to map out the perspective of the brick wall in the background and other architectural features, but does not extend beneath the figure. The underdrawing is still visible through the thinner applications of background color.

Paint layer(s):

The method of painting is likely indirect. The image appears to have been created with a gradual buildup of glazes in thin, even coats to add color and luminosity to the image. The scene is rendered realistically. It appears that the most visual weight is dedicated to the likeness of the sitter and the details of his dress. In less dominant areas, like the dog's fur and the background foliage, precise, flowing brushwork imparts naturalistic depth to the scene.

The most striking color throughout the painting is vermilion (estimated), possibly toned with red madder or other glazes. The rest of the painting is relatively neutral, possibly containing carbon or bone black, van Dyke or mummy brown, lead white, and earth pigments with lead white. A distinct blue pigment is incorporated in many shadows throughout the painting. Under magnification, the pigment particles are markedly large and appear consistent with cobalt blue. The painting is inscribed "Æta. 6. L. D. Jongh Fecit | A^o 1661" in the center right. The signature is painted in black on the dark background, making it difficult to read under normal illumination. The text is believed to be abbreviated Latin, roughly translating to "Aged 6, L[udolph] D[e] Jongh made | in the year 1661." The "A^o" character, an abbreviation of the Latin anno, is not mentioned in former documentation of the signature. A similar signature, including the "A^o," is more visible in other portraits by de Jongh [2].

Through X-radiography, details of lead white paint are visible on the $28 \frac{1}{4}$ inch-long strips used to extend the composition. When pasted together, the features on the right end of each strip can be aligned to roughly resemble painted highlights on fabric (see Appendix 1: Graphics related to canvas extension). Lines of lead white paint, canvas weave, and cusping all match. These details do not match the present painting. The evidence of other painting on the extended areas shows that scraps from a separately created painting were salvaged to extend the composition to its current dimensions.

Surface coating(s):

With the aid of longwave ultraviolet irradiation (315 – 400 nm), the painting fluoresces blue-green, signifying the presence of a natural resin varnish. The coating is glossy. Its thickness and color vary across the surface, which may be a result of an uneven cleaning of previous varnish layers. Notably, some passages fluoresce more orange, possibly indicating an oleo-resin varnish. The most recent layer was applied by brush, as large strokes are visibly spread across the painting. Clusters of partially dissolved resin particles are noticeable on the flower in the lower right corner; slightly proud from the rest of the varnished surface.

Frame:

The frame is comprised of a hardwood molding with gilt Louis XIV compo ornamentation, measuring 50 by 39 ¾ inches with a 37 ½ by 27 5/8 inch window. The rabbet is 7/8 inch deep. It is most likely not original to the painting. The frame has been modified with a softwood buildout on the back and felt padding in the rabbet. The frame is equipped with D-rings for hanging, and four Oz clips (two on each side, attached to bump outs) for transport. The painting and its Fome-cor backing board are held in the frame with spring clips.

Condition

General description/condition summary:

The painting has undergone multiple format changes in its lifetime but is stable due to former structural treatment. Aesthetically, dry and aqueous cleaning may increase legibility and reduce the appearance of surface grime. The frame requires treatment to improve handling stability but appears suitable for display with the painting.

Auxiliary support:

The stretcher is slightly keyed out but is in plane and supports the painting well since the joints are secure. A layer of surface dust is present.

Primary support:

The condition of the original support cannot be fully determined as it is obscured, though each canvas section appears stable and well-adhered to the lining canvas. One corner of the lining canvas is slightly detached from the back of the stretcher and creased. In combination, the lining and original canvas feel strong, but stiff. The reverse of the lining canvas has a layer of dust. The edges of the primary support sit proud from the lining canvas on some of the edges. The original canvas forms a plateau, extending up to 3/16 inch inwards from the edge. On the left edge, it is the most severe where the edges are cut unevenly. This likely occurred when the painting was lined, and feels stable to touch at present.

Preparation layer(s):

Small losses to the original ground layer may have occurred when the painting's format was changed. These areas appear distinct in infrared reflectography. Presently, the grounds are well adhered to the support, and the composition planning layers are well adhered to the grounds. The fills bridging the original canvas and extensions have slightly warped and cracked over time, causing the appearance of stretcher bar cracking.

Paint layer(s):

The paint layer is cracked overall due to mechanical stress and aging. The crack islands are generally small, regular, and closely spaced. The paint layer does not appear to be cracked from stretcher bar impressions, though there are cracks where the extension canvases are bridged. The craquelure appears to be stable.

Small losses to the paint layer ranging from ¼ - ½ inch diameter are present, but most have been previously filled (see Appendix 2: Condition map). The loss in the bottom right corner has been retouched but not filled. Other pinpoint losses have occurred at crack interstices, but none are visually distracting.

A scratch in the paint located beneath the dog was noted in previous loan reports, but appears fully consolidated, stable, and not obvious.

As the oil media has aged, some areas of change are visible. Part of the vermilion passage of ribbons at the figure's waist extends slightly beneath the grey of the corset. As the grey passage has become slightly more translucent with age, some of the vermilion is more visible. Other transparency changes may have occurred in the figure's sleeves, and in the proper left shoe.

Surface coating(s):

The varnish is slightly oxidized, appearing more yellow with some cracking throughout. There is a grime layer atop the varnish. The edges of the varnish have been abraded by the rabbet, causing a white, hazy appearance. The left edge of the painting appears to have a tide line in the varnish under UV fluorescence.

Multiple retouching campaigns are visible across the painting. With UV fluorescence, some appear beneath the most recent varnish layer, while some appear to be recent. The oldest retouching appears to encompass larger areas, like the majority of the extended format and large areas of the background. The most recent retouching effort appears to be atop the varnish layer, and the most judiciously applied to small losses.

The signature appears to have been reinforced with overpaint in some areas. Most notably, the "Fecit" seems mainly invented in another handwriting (see Appendix 3: Signature).

Frame:

The frame has many small losses to the gesso throughout, which have been toned to reduce visual distraction. Some areas in the round feel insecure to the touch and require consolidation.

CITATIONS:

- [1] Barbara A. Buckley, "Stretchers, Tensioning, and Attachments," in *The Conservation of Easel Paintings*, ed. Joyce Hill Stoner and Rebecca Rushfield (Routledge, 2012), 154.
- [2] Ludolph de Jongh, Jan van Nes (1631-80), Vice Admiral of Holland and West-Friesland, 1666, oil on canvas, 111.5 x 88.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/Jan-van-Nes-1631-80-Vice-admiral-of-Holland-and-West-Friesland--9b1e547c655bb59a4588bc50b9b7f475>.

Treatment Proposal:

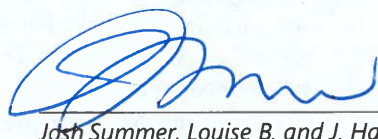
1. Perform written and photographic documentation before, during, and after treatment.
2. Dry cleaning of all accessible surfaces.
3. Test solubility in modified aqueous solutions and solvents.
4. Perform aqueous cleaning.
5. Evaluate the saturation of the painting with a coating of odorless mineral spirits, a refined hydrocarbon solution with slow evaporation to determine if varnish is needed.
6. Varnish the painting for improved saturation as needed.
7. As areas of loss may become more visible with aqueous cleaning, perform corrective retouching to match surrounding areas and unify the image.
8. Rehouse the painting with updates to framing hardware, hanging hardware, and backing.

The following is proposed to prepare the frame for display in the VMFA galleries:

1. Perform written and photographic documentation before, during, and after treatment.
2. Dry cleaning of all accessible surfaces.
3. Consolidate areas of insecurity with an appropriate adhesive.
4. Rehouse the painting with updates to framing hardware, hanging hardware, and backing.

Estimated Treatment Hours: 40.00

 24 July 2026
Margaret Priest, Graduate Intern in
Paintings Conservation - Summer 2026

 24 July 2026
Josh Summer, Louise B. and J. Harwood
Cochrane Associate Conservator of
Paintings

 July 24, 2026
Sylvain Cordier, European Art