

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM  
FINE ARTS

**LAURENT DE LA HYRE and workshop**

Paris 1606 - id. 1656

French School

**ALLEGORY OF MUSIC**

Oil on canvas

H. 1,05 m ; L. 1,42 m

Signed and dated lower left: *L. DE LA HIRE, / in. & F. 1649.*

DATE: 1649

PROVENANCE:

Probably Christie's sale, London, 8 May 1908, no. 87, oil on canvas, H. 1,03 m ; L. 1,42 m, signed and dated 1640 [a mistake?]

Private collection

RELATED WORKS:

Laurent de la Hyre, *Allegory of Music*, oil on canvas, H. 1,06 m ; L. 1,44 m, signed and dated 1649 (?), New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Charles B. Curtis Fund 1950.

Laurent de la Hyre, *Putto Playing the Viol* and *Putto Singing*, oils on canvas, each H. 1,03 m ; L. 0,54 m, Dijon, Musée Magnin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Corentin Dury (ed.), *Musées d'Orléans. Peintures françaises et italiennes. XV<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Ghent, 2023, n° 136, p. 266-267.

Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656) grew up in an artistic environment in Paris, where he initially learned writing and mathematics. Later, his father decided to have him copy drawings and teach him perspective and architecture. La Hyre went on to study the works of Primaticcio (1504-1570) at Fontainebleau, before spending some time in the studio of Georges Lallemant (c. 1570-c. 1635). He never travelled to Italy, but assimilated the lessons of Antiquity through prints. At the height of his artistic career in the 1640s, his style was characterised by antique architecture, precise perspective, and drapery borrowed from sculpture. Along with Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655), Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671) and Jacques Stella (1596-1657), he represented a new style of painting that flourished under Mazarin, defined as "Parisian Atticism" by Jacques Thuillier,<sup>1</sup> which is characterised by a quest for balance and clarity.<sup>2</sup>

The *Allegory of Music* is part of a decorative ensemble on the theme of the Liberal Arts as defined since the end of Antiquity.<sup>3</sup> This decorative scheme was studied by Pierre Rosenberg

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Thuillier, "Au temps de Mazarin. L'atticisme parisien", *La Peinture française. De Le Nain à Fragonard*, Geneva, 1964, p. 65-69; the term "atticisme" comes from Bernard Dorival, *La Peinture française*, Paris, 1942, t. I, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Mérot, *Éloge de la clarté. Un courant artistique au temps de Mazarin, 1640-1660*, exh. cat. Dijon, Musée Magnin, Le Mans, Musée de Tessé, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The *Liberal Arts* were divided into two groups, the first of which, the 'trivium', comprised dialectics (or logic), rhetoric and grammar, while the second, the 'quadrivium', included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. So, in today's terminology, music was considered a science. In the tradition of classical antiquity, these seven

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among others, notably in 1982 and 1988.<sup>4</sup> It comprises seven allegorical compositions depicting almost life-size female figures. This series is given unity by the antique architecture. Early documents<sup>5</sup> cite two series on this subject by Laurent de La Hyre. One was for the residence in the Marais district of Paris, of a certain Tallement<sup>6</sup> *maître des requêtes*, identified as Gédéon Tallemant (1613-1668), who is often confused with his famous eponymous cousin, the author of the *Historiettes*.<sup>7</sup> The second series was apparently painted for a connoisseur in Rouen, the home town of Gédéon Tallemant's mother, Anne de Rambouillet.<sup>8</sup> A third series or repetitions of individual paintings cannot be ruled out.

To date, no drawings or engravings of the decoration in Gédéon Tallemant's mansion are known, but it would probably have been in the same spirit as the Cabinet de l'Amour in the Hôtel Lambert (1645-1647): allegorical paintings set into panelling above a wainscot, and therefore placed quite high, above head level. The decoration remained in place until 1760, when it was removed and dispersed at an auction in Paris.<sup>9</sup>

In all, eleven paintings are known today that may relate to these two series of seven allegories of the Liberal Arts, the Tallemant series in Paris and the one owned by a collector in Rouen.

1. Music (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)
2. Music (our painting)
3. Astronomy (Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts)
4. Geometry (Private collection, France)
5. Geometry (Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, USA)
6. Rhetoric (Paris, Galerie Eric Coatalem)
7. Dialectic (Paris, Galerie Eric Coatalem)
8. Grammar (London, National Gallery)
9. Grammar (Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery)
10. Arithmetic (Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery)
11. Arithmetic (Hannema-De Stuers Foundation, Heino, the Netherlands)

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disciplines were considered essential to the education of a free and cultured individual. They were supposed to provide the intellectual skills needed for critical thinking, effective communication and understanding of the natural and human world. A. P. de Mirimonde, "Les allégories de la musique", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, December 1968, II, p. 295.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, *La peinture française du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les collections américaines*, exh. cat. Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1982, no. 33, p. 250-251 ; Pierre Rosenberg, Jacques Thuillier, *Laurent de La Hyre 1606-1656. L'homme et l'œuvre*, exh. cat. Grenoble, Rennes, Bordeaux, 1988, p. 292-297.

<sup>5</sup> For the first series: The text by Philippe de La Hire used by P. J. Mariette for his entry on the artist in his "Abécédario (...)", ed. Ph. de Chennevières and A. de Montaiglon, *Archives de l'Art français*, t. III, 1854-1856, p. 48-49; and by Guillet de Saint-Georges, "Mémoire sur Laurent de La Hyre (vers 1685)", L. Dussieux et al., *Mémoires inédits (...)*, Paris, 1854, p. 107. For the second series: Dezallier d'Argenville, *Abrégé de la Vie des plus fameux peintres*, Paris, 1745, ed. 1762, t. IV, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Built in 1623 by Claude Charlot, this mansion became the property of Tallemant in 1645. It is located at 58 rue Charlot, formerly called the Rue d'Angoumois, in the Marais quarter in Paris. Over time, it has been significantly modified, so that it is now impossible to locate the room in which the *Liberal Arts* decoration was located

<sup>7</sup> The *Historiettes* by Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux (1619-1692), first published by Louis Monmerqué in 1834, are a combination of uncompromising anecdotes and observations on Paris society under Louis XIII and at the start of Louis XIV's reign.

<sup>8</sup> Humphrey Wine *et al.*, "Laurent de La Hyre's Allegorical Figure of Grammar », *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 1993, vol. 14 (1993), p. 25 and note 23.

<sup>9</sup> Sale Paris, 22 February 1760 and following days: "(...) Tableaux, entre autres les Arts libéraux, originaux de La Hire de 1649 et 1650", cited by Pierre Rosenberg, Jacques Thuillier, *Laurent de La Hyre 1606-1656. L'homme et l'œuvre*, exh. cat. Grenoble, Rennes, Bordeaux, 1988, p. 292.

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According to ancient texts,<sup>10</sup> some of these allegories were accompanied by putti bearing attributes. To date, only the two fragments of the *Allegory of Music*, now in the Musée Magnin, have been identified.<sup>11</sup> The continuing architectural background and organ on the right confirm the unity of these three paintings, which form a triptych. The photographic reconstruction proposed by Mirimonde in 1968<sup>12</sup> clearly shows that this allegory would originally have been presented as a triptych.

These paintings are all between 102 and 106 cm high, even the *Allegory of Music* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Its height has been published erroneously as only 94 cm with a suggestion that its height was subsequently reduced.<sup>13</sup>

There is no factual evidence confirming that any of the paintings in this group of eleven belonged to the decor of Gédéon Tallemant's mansion or to the private mansion in Rouen already mentioned. According to Alastair Laing,<sup>14</sup> it is entirely possible that our painting came from this decor. Indeed, the high quality of its execution and its stylistic similarity to the other allegorical paintings in this series seem to support this hypothesis. What's more, X-ray images seem to reveal that the composition was changed.

Here, La Hyre depicts the allegory of music as a young woman with a Greek profile and draped in the Antique manner. She is tuning a theorbo, one of the earliest representations in France of this instrument.<sup>15</sup> This plucked string instrument was invented at the end of the 16th century in Italy, where it replaced the lute in the early 17th century. In France, the theorbo appeared several decades later, showing a real innovation when this composition was created. A gadrooned lute, a violin and bow, two French flageolets, a large shawm and an organ complete the composition. A great lover of music, La Hyre paid particular attention to the precise depiction of all these instruments.

The painting by La Hyre differs from earlier allegories of music<sup>16</sup> in that he has not shown any ancient instruments or mythological motifs, but rather instruments symbolic of the theory of universal harmony. He has ignored Cesare Ripa's indications,<sup>17</sup> except for the presence of a nightingale perched on the back of the chair. This bird signified the imitation of nature and the triumph of nature in the work of modern artists.

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<sup>10</sup> See note 1.

<sup>11</sup> Laurent de la Hyre, *Putto playing the Viol and Putto Singing*, oils on canvas, each H. 1,03 m ; L. 0,54 m, Dijon, Musée Magnin. Identified by Charles Sterling, *Chefs-d'œuvre de l'art français*, exh. cat. Paris, Palais national des Arts, June-October 1937, no. 80.

<sup>12</sup> A. P. de Mirimonde, "Les allégories de la musique", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, December 1968, II, (p. 295-324), especially p. 310-311, notes 39-43, p. 316, p. 323.

<sup>13</sup> Corentin Dury (ed.), *Musées d'Orléans. Peintures françaises et italiennes. XV<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Gand, 2023, n° 136, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> Written communication dated 21 July 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Joël Dugot, "Approche iconographique du théorbe en France, 1650-1700", *Musique Images Instruments. Revue française d'organologie et d'iconographie musicale, Aspects de la vie musicale au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 2, 03/1996, p. 178-179 (ill. p. 176).

<sup>16</sup> Gabriele Frings, "Ut Musica Pictura. Laurent de La Hyre's Allegory of Music (1649) as a mirror of Baroque Art and Music Theory", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, VI<sup>e</sup> période, tome CXXIII, 136<sup>e</sup> année, January 1994, p. 13-28.

<sup>17</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologie*, Venice, 1593, a book of which a large number of new editions appeared over the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in France from 1644.

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As a founding member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, Laurent de La Hyre was familiar with the new ideas on the relationship between modern progress and Antiquity, and between Art and Nature. He was thus able to meet demand and provide a visual illustration of the academic concerns of his time.

Laurent de La Hyre's well-balanced, architectural art, with its strong interest in Antiquity, is highly poetic. With its rigour and geometric clarity, this painting is entirely characteristic of an anti-baroque reaction in French painting.