

Condition Report: *Music-Making Couple*

*Completed by Lisa Truter on 15/05/2016*

**Table of Contents**

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>i) Description and Historical Information</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ii) Support</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>iii) Frame</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>iv) Ground</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>v) Paint Layer</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>vi) Varnish Layer</b>	<b>7</b>

**i) Description and Historical Information**

The object of this condition report is a Dutch seventeenth century oil on panel painting attributed to Hendrick Verschuring (2 November 1627- 26 April 1690). The work is entitled *Music-Making Couple* (accession number 74), although previous records have also referred to it as *The Singers*. The subject matter of the piece includes two figures; a male figure playing a lute, accompanied by a female figure reading from a song book. The artist's inscription can, with careful observation, be made out at the bottom left-hand corner of the panel. Earlier reports state that a date can be made out adjacent to this description, with speculation being made that the numbers read 1662, however these numbers are not currently legible. The painting forms part of the Michaelis Collection donated by Sir Max Michaelis in 1914. The collection is typically housed in the Old Town House on Greenmarket Square, Cape Town, yet at the date of this condition report, is currently being exhibited in the Iziko South African National Gallery.

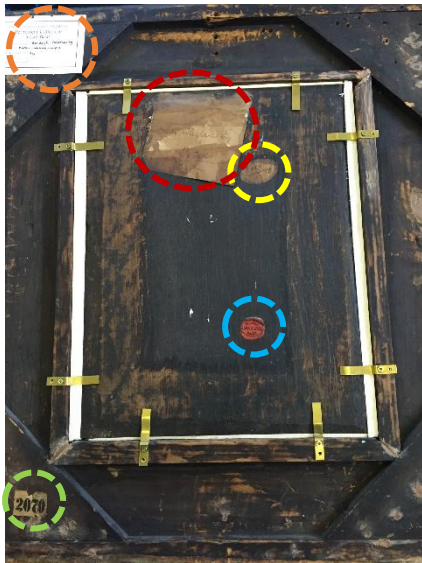
Verschuring, said to be a well-known artist within the Baltic States, was for many years a pupil of Jan Both. Under his guidance, the artist travelled frequently to Italy, where his works became increasingly popular in Venice. Although he initially most typically painted soldiers, particularly on horseback, as well as genre paintings, following his travels his preference shifted to landscapes. In fact, Verschuring is recognised as an *Italianisant* or *Bambocciata* painter, names given to a group of artists from Northern Europe who became landscape painters upon inspiration by the Italian landscape specifically. His earliest works are dated from 1651, and the artists continued to practice until his death by drowning in Dordrecht in 1690. The artist was also for some time the mayor of Gorinchem, the city in which he was born.

Notable galleries within which Verschuring's works have been exhibited include the Louvre, the National Gallery, London, the Mauritshuis as well as the Uffizi Gallery.



## i) Support

The support of the painting is made up by a single wooden panel. Given that the painting is derived from Northern Europe during the seventeenth century, it can be assumed that this is oak. The panel is secured by plates without any backboard. The reverse of the panel is bevelled and has been bolstered more recently in order to ensure stability within its frame. Despite some minor scuff marks and scratches, the panel appears to be in good condition with no loss of strength as well as no sign of distortion.



**Figure 2**

The reverse of the panel has had several different ‘labels’ adhered to it. Figure 2 adjacent depicts the layout of these pieces, 5 individual markings which have been circled for easy identification.

The largest of these pieces, found at the centre of the top edge of the panel, and circled in red, has written on it the title “Max Michaelis Esq”. Below this one can read; “Oxted” and “near London”. A close up image of this can be seen at Figure 3 below. This marking may have been attached to the work upon its acquisition by Hugh Lane on behalf of Sir Max Michaelis.

From whence this piece was purchased is unfortunately unknown however, the smaller, ovular label circled in yellow just to the right of the Michaelis label reads “9572”, written above “Verschuring”. This number could perhaps represent an accession number at another gallery, or potentially a lot number at auction.

Below these aged pieces of paper, toward the bottom edge of the panel (circled in blue at Figure 2), is a red wax seal. As can be seen in Figure 4 below, the seal reads; “Galerie Sedelmeyer, Paris”. The gallery, owned by Austrian art dealer and collector, Charles Sedelmeyer (1837-1925), is known as having exhibited and sold works of the Old Dutch Masters, including the likes of Rubens and Rembrandt. It is not known if this piece was purchased from this gallery for Sir Max Michaelis, or if a previous owner had purchased the work from here.



**Figure 3**



Figure 4



Figure 5

The remaining to pieces on the reverse of the painting are actually placed on the reverse of the frame. Circled in **green** at the bottom left-hand corner of figure 2 and pictured in detail at figure 5 is the number “2079”, the paper upon which this is printed appears to have aged similarly to the pieces discussed in figure 3 and thus could be presumed to represent another accession number or lot number.

In contrast to this, the piece at the top left-hand corner of the frame and circled in **orange**, is a more recent addition; a label added indicating the painting’s inclusion in the Michaelis collection. The artist’s name, the title and the accession number can be seen listed here, as indicated in figure 6.



Figure 6

ii) **Frame**



Figure 7

The panel is currently bolstered into a moulded, gilded and gold painted frame. Currently the frame does not include glazing, yet it is documented that in 1941, under the guidance of Ruth Prowse, glass was removed. It can be speculated that this frame is not the original. It is characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century nouveau riche English framing – as opposed to the simpler, black frames typical of seventeenth century Dutch painting. Evidence of the current frame



**Figure 8**

being a more recent addition is found also in the fact that flaking and scuff marks are evident in places along the edge of the panel, most notably along the top edge, as pictured in figure 7.

As can be seen in the adjacent image, a title plate has been tacked to the bottom edge of the plate, listing the artist's name, along with his birth and death dates.

In its entirety, the frame appears to be in good condition with little damage to its exterior as well as being structurally sound and rigid. Notable damage is seen on the outer most edge of the frame, on the top right hand edge. Previous restoration has been attempted on this 4cm long piece, with what appears to be putty or clay that has been painted gold, this can be seen in Figure 9 alongside.



**Figure 9**

Other notable damage has occurred along the bottom, outermost edge of the frame, the frame has been chipped in several places, consequently exposing the white colour of the underlying material.

These chips vary, and although not as deep as the aforementioned damage to the right-hand side of the frame, reach lengths of up to 2cm in certain places (seen in figure 10). Fine cracks at the centre of the top edge of the frame, as well as an arch shaped crack at the innermost edge of the right hand side of the frame are also visible.



**Figure 10**

Splits can be seen at all for mitres, these too also appear to have been previously repaired using a similar, or the same material as referred to above with regard to figure 9. This repair work is evident in figure 11.



**Figure 11**

### iii) **Ground**

The panel was not removed from the frame during this examination and thus the outermost edges of the panel could not be closely studied. The ground does not appear to be showing in the more easily visible areas of the painting, however along the edges, most notably, where flaking and scuff marks have occurred as a result potentially of reframing as previously mentioned, small areas of ground are visible (Figure 7). The colour that shows through is of a raw umber/brown/ochre shade, given this, it can be presumed that this is in fact an imprimatura layer.

In its entirety, the ground layer appears to be intact with no signs of lifting or flaking.

### iv) **Paint Layer**

The oil paint appears to have been applied finely and evenly. No signs of drying cracks or of flaking are apparent, although the surface in its entirety is covered in a network of age cracks. This craquelure appears to be unevenly distributed, however.

As can be made out in the adjacent micrograph image in figure 12, age cracks are substantially more evident in the dark colours of the background, in contrast to the two figures in the foreground. The yellow curve indicates where the craquelure



**Figure 12**

pattern changes from less apparent within the curve, to more noticeable outside of the curve. Potential reasoning for this will be explored in the report on varnish layer later. The overall pattern of the craquelure can be seen in the micrograph image at figure 13.

Although, upon initial inspection the surface of the painting appears to be clean, only with small amounts of dust present, study under Ultra-Violet light, however revealed to surface to be largely unclean. Furthermore, study under micrograph rendered apparent the milkyness of the surface, possibly and most likely due to surface bloom. This bloom probably occurred as a result of exposure to poor climate conditions, particularly humidity. This is not surprising given



**Figure 13**

the lack of climate control in the Old Town House where the piece is most prominently housed. The fact that the frame was previously accompanied by a glass glaze, may also have contributed to this damage.



**Figure 14**

Abrasions to the paint layer are visible yet not major. The most notable abrasion can be seen along the top curve of the lyre (Figure 14). A less apparent abrasion is seen on the top left hand corner of the painting and runs vertically down the image, it is approximately 2cms long.

v) **Varnish Layer**

Uneven distribution of age cracks implies similarly an uneven distribution of varnish to the surface. It is likely that additional layers of varnish were painted over the background of the image, whilst either layers of varnish were removed from the foreground, or that over painting of the figures was previously completed, or both.

In its entirety, the varnish layer appears to have been thickly applied, seen both under Ultra-Violet and raking light.

It can be speculated that additional layers of varnish have been more recently applied, given that the artist's inscription is today so obscured. A micrograph image of this extremely faint signature, on the left hand-corner of the painting, can be seen at Figure 14. Although it is evident that some sort of inscription exists, it cannot be confirmed exactly as to what this inscription reads.



**Figure 15**