

Artmaking as Embodied Knowledge Shaped by Disability: The Case of Hendrick Goltzius

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An accident at a young age left Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), an engraver, draftsman, and painter, with scar tissue that affected the mobility of his hand. During Goltzius's lifetime, the artist and historian Karel van Mander published a biography that positioned Goltzius as a pinnacle of artistic excellence comparable to Michelangelo. A reevaluation of Goltzius's career through the lens of critical disability theory reveals that his engagement with the theme of the hand in his artworks, as well as its significance in his biography, framed his disability as a source of unique embodied knowledge and pride.

INTRODUCTION

At an early age, Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617)—an engraver, print publisher, draftsman, and painter—fell into the hearth, burning his right hand,¹

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¹According to his contemporary biographer, Karel van Mander, "when he was a year or so old and could walk by himself, he fell into the fire with his face over a pan of boiling oil and burned both his hands in the red-hot coals, which his mother carefully tried to heal with splints, ointments and other things, and he was in much pain day and night, until a know-all female neighbour removed the splints saying that she could do better, she then bound only the right

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a common childhood injury at the time that usually ended with no serious harm; however, it left Goltzius with scar tissue that affected the mobility of his hand to an unknown extent.² Karel van Mander included a biography of Goltzius in his *Schilder-boeck* (Book on painting, Amsterdam, 1604), among biographies of ancient, Italian, and Northern artists that form the book's core, accompanied by a didactic poem and two sections on iconography.³ According to Van Mander, this injury did not prevent Goltzius from using his impaired hand when making art, saying he "tried with his bad hand to learn to engrave on

hand in a cloth on account of which the tendons of that hand grew together with the consequence that throughout his life he could never completely open that hand" ("maer was oock so tot den vuyre gheneghen, dat hy een laer oft meer oudt wesende, alleen gaende, op t'vier viel, met t'aensicht boven pan met ghebranden Oly, verbernde in de gloeyende colen beyde zijn handen, welcke hem zijn Moeder vlijtigh pooghde wel te ghenesen, met spalcken, smeerren, en anders, in groote smerten nacht en dagh, tot dat een neus wijse buyr-vrouw quam de spalcken ontbinden, segghende: sy soudet beter beschicken, windende slechts de rechter handt in eenen doeck, waer door de senuwen der selver aen den anderen groeyden, in voegen dat hy zijn leven de handt noyt recht open doen con"): Van Mander, 386 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 282^v). Except when otherwise stated, translations of Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* included in the article are from Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters: From the First Edition of the "Schilder-boeck" (1603–1604)*, translated and edited by Hessel Miedema.

²The Städel Museum further states that at least a few of Goltzius's "fingers were curled inwards, and he was unable to stretch them out." Digital Collection of the Städel Museum, <https://www.staedelmuseum.de/go/ds/805z>; Schütt and Sonnabend, 68. Van Mander writes that "the sinews grew one into the other, so that he could throughout his life never properly open his hand: 386 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 282^v); translation from Woodall, 222. Discussion of the injury from a medical perspective can be found in Kaminska, 2024b, 616, 625. I am grateful to Dr. Kaminska for insightful discussions and for informing me of her article prior to its publication. I hope that our two articles' distinctive contributions will enrich the study of early modern disability.

³Van Mander based much of his information about Goltzius on his direct interaction with the artist, referring to conversations and viewing of artworks in Goltzius's house and studio, where Van Mander was a frequent visitor. Together with Cornelis van Haarlem, they were coleaders of the movement known as the Haarlem Mannerists and cofounders of what an anonymous biography of van Mander refers to as the Academy to Study After Life, which probably functioned as a theoretical discussion group. See Hyman, 5–6. Van Mander also affected Goltzius's artistic development by introducing him to the works of Bartholomeus Spranger. This mutually nurturing relationship shows a history of collaboration that likely affected the writing of Goltzius's biography. Van Mander, 405 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 286^v). See also Melion, 1989, 113–15.

copper, which he from the start managed so well.”⁴ Indeed, scholars suggest that his right hand was his dominant hand for artistic production.⁵ Although his impaired hand did not limit his ability to practice art, social reactions in his time and even some twenty-first-century considerations positioned Goltzius as Other due to this impairment, thus inviting a reading of his experiences and career through a disability lens. In an era where personal accounts of disability were scarce, Goltzius demonstrated remarkable autonomy in shaping his public persona. Through a deliberate interplay of textural records and art production, he carefully curated a representation of himself that showcased a profound awareness of his embodied experience as a source of pride. This essay will show how his (dis)ability became part of his identity and how he negotiated this identity in his professional sphere.⁶

Goltzius was born in Germany, in the town Mulbracht near the border of the Netherlands. He moved to Haarlem in 1577 and established a successful print publishing business there around 1578. Goltzius was an outstanding figure in Dutch art during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and was internationally acclaimed in his day for his sophisticated and intricate engravings. As the son of the glass painter Jan Goltz II, he continued the tradition of his artistic lineage. His friend and biographer Karel van Mander wrote that, in Goltzius’s early days in Mulbracht, his father nurtured his passion for art and beauty, affecting his later career. The extent of his success is demonstrated by his gain of a royal privilege from Rudolf II in 1595, protecting his designs from copyists within the ruler’s territories for six years. This honor marks Goltzius’s far-reaching reputation as one of Europe’s preeminent graphic artists. In 1601, Jacob Matham—Goltzius’s stepson—obtained a royal privilege from Prague, following the same conditions to which Goltzius was privileged, but without the six-year limitation. This privilege followed Matham’s admission to the Haarlem guild as an engraver, following in the footsteps of Goltzius, who had proudly signed his prints from around 1585: “gedruckt tot Haerlem,” “imprime a Haerlem,” “Impressum Harlemi” (printed in Haarlem), thus preserving Goltzius’s legacy.⁷

Goltzius’s biography was the climax of Van Mander’s narrative and responded to the 1568 edition of Giorgio Vasari’s *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori*,

⁴“en versocht oock met zijn lamme handt in’t coper te leeren snijden”: Van Mander, 386 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 282’).

⁵Hulst, 373–79; Nichols, 7; Melion, 67.

⁶I use the parenthetical (*dis*)*ability* to mark both the fluidity between disability and ability and to visually mark the power relations between the privileged ability and the marginalized disability. See Schalk.

⁷Filedt Kok, 162–63, 195; Nichols.

scultori, e architettori (The lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors, and architects; henceforth the *Lives*), which argued for the cultural authority of Florence in the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, unified in the term *disegno*, the act of drawing and designing artwork.⁸ As Walter Melion shows, Van Mander contrasted Vasari by promoting *teyckenconst* as a translation and modification to *disegno*. *Teyckenconst*, the art of inscribing and delineation, offered a new critical category for evaluating works of art. Goltzius holds a singular place in Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* as a master of *teyckenconst*, equivalent to the place of Michelangelo Buonarroti as the ultimate master of *disegno* in Vasari's *Lives*.⁹

First published while Goltzius was still alive, the biography describes his childhood and entrance into the profession of art; offers an extremely rich report of his travel to Italy, during which he assumed different aliases; and explores his artistic production in engraving and painting. Van Mander's biographical sketch highlights Goltzius's poor health, fluid identity,¹⁰ sense of humor, and creativity. Viewing this biography as a collaboration between Goltzius and Van Mander, as convincingly suggested by Linda C. Hulst, offers an opportunity to see how the artist constructed his identity as entwined with his embodiment through a visual and literary corpus; however, Hulst narrates Goltzius's career as a story of overcoming the adversities of disability.¹¹ This view of Goltzius's career perpetuates ideas about disability as a deficiency that prevail in much of the literature on disability history, which applies medicalized and charitable models to the study of early modern disability experiences.

I propose interpreting Goltzius's career as a narrative of disability gain, where his embodied experience became a generative force that fueled his artistic innovation and success.¹² Goltzius had clear agency in shaping his public perception through his close relationship with his biographer and through his

⁸The term *disegno* is regarded as an ideal of the era, and the historiographical tendency is to define it in terms of intellectual merit, highlighting the invention of a new form of representation and the ability to organize its visual components.

⁹Melion, 1989, 113–15; Melion, 1993, 62, 65–69.

¹⁰A characteristic manifested in his assumption of multiple aliases and emulation of the styles of varied artists.

¹¹Hulst, 373–75, 397–98.

¹²Deaf studies scholars have pioneered a new perspective, highlighting the concept of gain to rethink and redefine the experiences of Deaf individuals. They are joined by disability studies scholars who have expanded this notion. See, for example, Barker; Bauman et al; Garland-Thomson, 2016; Bauman and Murray; Hobgood, 49–78; Chottin and Thompson, 32–44; Kleege, 2017, 141–45; Kleege, 2010, 57–67; and Vierke. See also Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Disability Gain," paper presentation at the Avoidance and the Academy Conference, Hope University, Liverpool, September 2013.

artistic production. He also actively and playfully challenged the boundaries of his identity and examined his place in his field in ways that allow for productive thinking about the role of artmaking in self-fashioning. In this essay, I will review the current discourse on disability history and its relation to disability studies and suggest how disability studies can enrich the discourse of self-fashioning. I will explore the hand as a motif in Goltzius's art and its importance in theorizing early modern Italian and Northern art; the centrality of the hand in Goltzius's social interactions during his travels to Italy; and how his embodied experiences shaped his art after his return to the Netherlands. I will read his masquerading from a disability studies perspective to demonstrate how his experience of hiding and revealing his identity affected the themes and techniques he engaged with after his trip.

I argue that Goltzius transformed his (dis)ability into a defining aspect of his artistic persona and emphasized it in the narration of his career, leveraging the hand motif in his art and performances to shape his identity and public image. This claim challenges the medical model of disability, which observes disability as a deficiency in the individual that must be corrected. In its place, this research underscores the pressing need to integrate disability studies frameworks into art historical narratives by following the cultural model of disability, according to which disability is a historical system of thought and knowledge in which bodymind (a term borrowed from disability studies that entwines body and mind as an integrated unit) and culture are mutually influential.¹³ By analyzing various cultural discourses, including art, literature, and history, the cultural model reveals how disability is represented and constructed.¹⁴ This interdisciplinary approach engages with critical theories such as cultural studies, feminist studies, and ethnic studies to challenge dominant narratives about disability. It investigates disability from both a representational and an experiential perspective, reframing it as a complex, multifaceted concept that shapes the common understanding of human differences, influences resource distribution, and informs social relationships. My claim builds on Walter Melion, who identifies the hand as a positive motif in Van Mander's biography of Goltzius and convincingly suggests that the biographer associated Goltzius's impaired dominant hand, in which he held his burin (engraving tool), with *teyckenconst*. According to Melion, Van Mander defined *teyckenconst* as composed of drawing, painting, and engraving, in contrast to painting, sculpture, and architecture (which composed the Tuscan *disegno*), and thus replaced Michelangelo with Goltzius as a champion of this

¹³ My use of the term *bodymind* invites reconsideration of the early modern discourse about the self, which frequently prioritizes the mind over the body.

¹⁴ Garland-Thomson, 2004; Garland-Thomson, 1998.

art. He suggests that Van Mander emphasized the hand as a motif in the biography to establish Goltzius's burned hand as an effective agent of *teyckenconst*.¹⁵ I am taking his claim a step further, claiming that Goltzius's engagement with the theme of the hand in his artwork and as it is developed in his biography should be read as an embrace of his impairment and (dis)ability experience as a source of unique embodied knowledge and pride.

In the first section, I shall review the historiography of disability and self to contextualize my intervention and interpretation of Goltzius's career and art. The second section will investigate the hand motif in Goltzius's work in a sociocultural context. The third section will explore Goltzius's travel to Italy, his embodied experience during this trip, and the hand's role in his identity performance. Finally, the fourth section will tackle the influence of the artist's embodied and performative experience on the subjects and techniques he engaged in his art and identity formation.

FROM OVERCOMING TO GAIN: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DISABILITY AND SELF

The historiography of disability is still a work in progress. Although the term *disability* is rare and often absent in records of premodern attitudes to the social and cultural attribution of corporeal variations, atypicality, or difference, disability has always existed, framed differently in each century. The concept of disability has evolved significantly since the early modern period. Yet premodern experiences of bodymind variation shaped early modern history and, as today, had social, cultural, political, and economic significance. With this research, I join a growing community of disability scholars who use critical disability theory as an analytical category to examine the experiences of individuals with impairments in historical contexts.¹⁶ This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how social and cultural factors shape the meaning and impact of (dis)ability, a term I will explore in greater detail ahead.

The study of early modern disability poses a significant methodological challenge, as archival records are often biased and skewed toward charitable and disciplinary contexts. This results in a distorted representation of individuals with disabilities, disproportionately depicting them in situations of poverty, dependence, and marginalization. There is a striking scarcity of first-person early modern disability records, leaving a substantial void in preserving personal experiences and narratives, and compelling scholars to rely on institutional records. Scholars like Klaus-Peter Horn and Bianca Frohne have sought to

¹⁵ Melion, 1993, 66–67.

¹⁶ For example, Bearden; Chess; Hobgood; Kaminska, 2024a and 2024b; and Lo Conte, 2024a and 2024b.

redress this imbalance by examining disability narratives across a more diverse social spectrum, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of disability experiences in early modern history.¹⁷ Yet even the valuable case studies in this essay largely rely on witnesses who were seemingly not disabled.

By applying disability as an analytical category, scholars can resist the distortion of historical narratives that generally obscure the contributions of disabled subjects to the formation of early modern society and culture. One of the major challenges in the research of early modern disability is locating primary sources for subjects not dependent on charity, particularly records in the first person. One way to answer the methodological problem of identifying relevant primary sources is to reevaluate the lives and records of well-studied figures like Goltzius, who have not been considered with the tools offered by disability studies.¹⁸ (Dis)ability can be understood as the dynamic outcome of an interaction between an individual with atypical bodymind characteristics and the social, cultural, and environmental contexts they navigate, which can either enable or limit their participation and inclusion.¹⁹ Applying this framework can allow us to interpret early modern narratives with the help of contemporary case studies and knowledge.

Contemporary disability experiences and methodologies can shed light on early modern experiences and social engagement by helping scholars reconsider known early modern figures and their records. Goltzius is a particularly valuable case study of a known figure with a well-recorded physical atypicality. His biography and achievements were documented during his lifetime by a person close to him, and he produced a significant number of artworks, including self-portraits, that can be read as autobiographical. Physical impairment will not always be translated into disability, which makes the concept of (dis)ability particularly useful. It marks a shift in ability and social status depending on context.²⁰ In Goltzius's case, his physical difference was well known among his contemporaries, and his social encounters became a stage for self-fashioning through varied self-representations that offered opportunities for learning and growth, as I will discuss in depth in the context of his travel to Italy.

¹⁷Horn and Frohne, 17–21. This rich methodological discussion is followed by fascinating examples of disability as a cross-class phenomenon. I thank the anonymous reviewer of *Renaissance Quarterly* for referring me to this source.

¹⁸Kaminska, 2024b, is an exception.

¹⁹Bearden, 70–71, 81–84, 90–91. Simone Chess discusses the construction of (ab)normality in the Renaissance and highlights the importance of reading ability and disability as historically bound. She questions the assumptions of linear progress in the social construction of disability toward the model of disability justice. See Chess.

²⁰Schalk.

The early modern records of Hendrick Goltzius's life offer a significant opportunity to discuss the role of embodied experiences in formulating the self. Linda Hulst describes Goltzius's biography as an act of self-fashioning in which the biographer and the artist collaborated to produce an image of the artist as a "brilliantly talented, virtuous, suffering but ultimately triumphant, artist-hero." At the same time, she suggests that Goltzius's biography fashioned Van Mander as the authority on the history of Northern art and a witness of artistic greatness.²¹ Given the friendship between the two and Van Mander's credible claim of receiving his information directly from Goltzius, Hulst's suggestion of reading the biography in terms of self-fashioning is compelling.²² She describes Goltzius as a "virtuous, heroic, protean artist . . . whose fiery creative spirit could not be doused by illness or disfigurement by fire itself." She adds that the narrative Van Mander formed "helped to compensate for traits that would have diminished [Goltzius's] masculinity in early modern eyes, such as disfigurement, humoral imbalance, and childlessness."²³ At first reading, the heroism that Goltzius and his biographer attribute to the artist seems to suggest a narrative that matches the trope of "overcoming disability," discussed in disability studies literature as implying deficiency in the person and denotes disability as a source of shame that must be overcome for the person to be a productive member of society.²⁴ However, in the light of critical disability theory, an alternative reading will show that Goltzius's storytelling and the narrative written by Van Mander do not center overcoming but instead underline Goltzius's ability to harness those qualities as advantages in the development of his career.

Living with an impaired hand since infancy, Goltzius experienced challenges shared by many within the disability community. Aside from encountering physical challenges, he was an object of curious gazes that shaped his social perception. For example, his appearance was described in letters received by one of his acquaintances during his trip to Italy. These descriptions emphasized his scarred hand and made him an object of curiosity, as will be

²¹ Hulst, 373–75.

²² A similar claim was made about Michelangelo's biography written by his pupil and friend Ascanio Condivi. Condivi published his biography of Michelangelo Buonarroti in 1553, responding to Michelangelo's biography in the 1550 edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*. Many scholars explained Condivi's biography as an attempt to protect Michelangelo's reputation from certain claims in Vasari's biography, authorized by Michelangelo himself. See, for example, Wilde, 1–16; Wallace, 110–18; Condivi, xv–xx; and Pon, 1032–36. Some of these scholars go as far as to say that Michelangelo prompted the writing of this biography, actively fashioning his narrative.

²³ Hulst, 397–98.

²⁴ Linton, 17–22.

discussed ahead.²⁵ To understand Goltzius's unusual control over his narrative, it can be helpful to consider Simone Chess's work on atypical bodies in early modern England, which highlights the distinct experiences of infants versus adults. While infants' bodies were subject to external interpretation and theorization, adults could exert control over their narratives and redirect the gaze. She focuses specifically on what is referred to as monstrous birth and categorizes diverse social receptions as driven by medical, moralistic, and voyeuristic approaches. Chess's analysis of ballads—usually composed by nondisabled individuals and rarely written or performed by their subjects—exposes a level of agency in the adult subjects' self-fashioning due to their ability to provide their own narratives to the writer.²⁶ Although Hendrick Goltzius's impairment doesn't fit the category of monstrosity, Chess's study allows for the reinterpretation of Goltzius's self-fashioning project and its context, shedding light on how he navigated societal perceptions.²⁷

Goltzius understood his time's social expectations and hierarchies and their manifestation through embodiment. He took advantage of this knowledge and fashioned himself to claim a place in the artistic community. To that end, Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that early modern people were aware of a self that can be fashioned is important for understanding Goltzius's social performance. Greenblatt contends that there is, in every period, a self that meets the world and has distinct characteristics and desires. It can always shape itself to some extent and express its identity intentionally but within a framework of external and conflicting powers.²⁸ Rather than autonomy in self-fashioning, Greenblatt suggests that the shaping of the self in the sixteenth century occurred in the intersection between the personal and the institutional, the institutional being chiefly family, religion, and state. This notion recognizes external powers as crucial to the development of self.²⁹ Greenblatt's self-fashioning is a mechanism of control, a cultural system of meaning-making articulated through the individual. He describes a self bounded in time and place, shaped through negotiation with political, social, and religious circumstances. John Martin, in contrast, describes a complex relationship between internal and external selves

²⁵ Van Mander writes that Goltzius's friend and companion Philip van Winghen received letters during their travel to Italy, which I expand on below. In those letters, his correspondent Abraham Ortelius describes Goltzius, "mentioning some distinguishing features of his shape and appearance including his deformed right hand" ("daer by oock eenighe litteeckenen van zijn gestaltnis en persoon, oock van zijn creupel rechter hand"): Van Mander, 393 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283").

²⁶ Chess, 25–29.

²⁷ Joanna Woodall does refer to Goltzius as representative of the monstrous: Woodall, 222.

²⁸ Greenblatt, 1.

²⁹ Greenblatt, 80.

and theorizes their roles in an ethical field that demands constant negotiation in everyday life.³⁰ Martin characterizes the sixteenth century as a period of increased self-consciousness about the ability to fashion and manipulate one's identity in an "artful process."³¹ Martin examines moral categories relating to the terms *sincerity* and *prudence* and tries to link these categories to a sense of subjectivity and individualism that was prominent in the period. He suggests that the moral vocabulary of prudence and sincerity was crucial in constructing individualism as a concept in the Renaissance.³²

For both Martin and Greenblatt, the court as an institution was vital for the development of self-fashioning, acting as a site for an elaborate performance of the self. Martin argues that deception was often perceived as a virtue in the court, as in the example of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), and he describes the sixteenth century as a "theatrical age."³³ Indeed, it seems that in courtly society, men and women were encouraged to present a particular self that would allow them to advance within the court's hierarchy and achieve social acceptance—as can be deduced from the many advice books of the time, most prominently Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528).³⁴ The idea of courtly demeanor was important for the artists' community as they attempted to improve their social status during the sixteenth century, an undertaking that

³⁰ Martin, 1997, 1333–34. According to Martin, what was new about the sixteenth-century idea of the self was an understanding of the correlation (or lack of it) between thoughts and feelings to words and actions. Martin defines prudence and the sincere ideal as conflicting ideas that shaped the Renaissance notion of self. Martin's later book challenges traditional views of Renaissance individualism by introducing several modalities of the Renaissance self that enabled fluidity between modalities. Martin argues that these modalities were not mutually exclusive, and individuals could embody multiple selves depending on the context. See Martin, 2007, 14–15, 124–33.

³¹ Greenblatt, 2.

³² Martin, 1997, 1311–14, 1325–26. According to Martin, the Renaissance transformed the concept of prudence from a virtue that restrained desires for spiritual salvation to a personal ability to adapt to changing circumstances by separating internal thoughts from external actions. This shift reflected a new understanding of individualism and human subjectivity. Martin also explores sincerity, defined as alignment between feeling and expression, as a key modern concern in art and literature.

³³ Martin, 1997, 1324.

³⁴ Martin, 1997, 1314. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* demonstrates the need to hold an accepted performance within the courtly context. His characters speak about the need to perform diverse talents easily and capably, and the need to be cautious and reserved. They talk about how much the courtier should eat and drink, how the courtier should dress and behave in company, and what talents the courtier should perform to serve their prince. The popularity of Castiglione's book across Europe shows the courtly engagement with presenting the self. See Castiglione, 3–260, esp. 22–24, 52, 88–90, 130.

influenced Van Mander's writing, in which he promotes the liberal status of the visual arts. Therefore, he promoted Goltzius not only as an artistic model but also as a behavioral exemplar. Martin relies on Greenblatt's idea that social actions are always influenced by "systems of public signification,"³⁵ meaning that they are interpreted by society based on social protocols. These actions are performed from positions within society, and therefore out of awareness of the possibilities and consequences with regard to societal norms.

Douglas Biow complicates Martin's and Greenblatt's notions of self-fashioning, and his attitude resonates with disability studies and affect theory scholarship, highlighting the constant loop of social and environmental influences between the body and the world.³⁶ He argues that selfhood is always a construction that people deconstruct and reconstruct repeatedly. Instead of the gap between the internal and external, as explained by Martin, Biow identifies a system of ever-becoming fostered by loops of internalization and projection.³⁷ This convincing conceptualization of identity-making sees the self as constructed through a feedback system, similar to Marilyn Cooper's understanding of writing as a mode of constant becoming. Cooper argues that embodiment is an ongoing, fluid meshing and entanglement between the bodymind and the world. She explains that people think with their bodies and not just their brains, creating intra-actions that mesh bodies with environments. People collaborate with other beings and things, and their embodiment is generated through the difference between bodymind and the environment.³⁸

The fluidity between people's modes of being and ability is crucial for disability studies. Sami Schalk uses the term *(dis)ability* "to designate the socially constructed system of norms which categorizes and values bodyminds based on concepts of ability."³⁹ (Dis)ability visually gestures toward the mutually dependent nature of disability and ability. It suggests the changing nature of these terms based on social and environmental circumstances while also marking the traditionally marginalized position of disability.⁴⁰ To this, I add the fluidity of ability itself. Instead of the harsh division of disabled/abled, (dis)ability suggests the potential of experiencing both ability and disability in

³⁵ Martin, 1997, 1314.

³⁶ The idea of identity as a constant loop appears, for example, in Watkins, 269, 273; Clough, 206–24; Lloyd, 42–47, 48, 96; Lehwica, 59–96; and Siebers, 2008, 72, 118, 160–62. Similar notions can be found in Bourdieu, 169–73, 268–69.

³⁷ Biow, 3.

³⁸ Cooper, 46–47. Cooper's ideas also correspond with the affect theory literature that follows Spinoza in theorizing a notion of body-thing relation (*individuum*): for example, Ahmed, 38; Clough, 206–08, 211–15; and Blackman, 5–7.

³⁹ Schalk.

⁴⁰ Schalk.

different contexts and over time. The fluidity of (dis)ability acknowledges the possibility of every person experiencing disability throughout their lifetime as a consistent or temporary state. Applying this approach to historical material will expand the available corpus and help create a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of disability as an early modern phenomenon beyond a specific social category. Applying critical disability theory to the theatrical age of the sixteenth century, in which disabled people were often considered to be spectacles or charity cases,⁴¹ enables seeing how Goltzius assumed the roles of both director and actor to control his narrative.

Goltzius's career should not be framed as a narrative of overcoming disability. Instead, I propose that it can be productively constructed as a narrative of disability gain. People often think of disability as loss—an expected result of the need to redefine one's sense of self in response to changes in their embodiment, as they face a world that is not always willing to accommodate those changes. Responding to this common assumption, disability, blindness, and Deaf scholars have invited the public to reconsider and reimagine the disabled body through the discourse of gain. Goltzius's ability changed over time, and so did his interaction with the world—but throughout his shifting experiences, he seems to have framed his hand not as a source of shame but of pride. The right-hand motif appears in several artworks throughout Goltzius's career and should be read with his practice of self-fashioning in mind.

BY HIS HAND: THE HAND MOTIF IN WORKS BY HENDRICK GOLTZIUS

Goltzius adopted his scarred hand as a personal symbol in some of his works—for example, in his intricate, larger-than-life-size drawing from 1588, known as *Goltzius's Right Hand* (fig. 1). He utilized the surface of the drawing by foreshortening the fingers and creating volume and movement in the gesture with multiple networks of crosslines on the wrist and the margins of the fingers. The back of the hand's topography reveals the hills of his joints and veins strongly lit, defined by valleys constructed by soft lines of brown ink that become increasingly dense in the shaded areas of the hand. The hand's position references the depiction of hands in other works by Goltzius and works by artists such as Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611) and Cornelis van Haarlem (1562–1638). However, its unusual treatment as the single subject of the drawing suggests that the work conveys meaning beyond its aesthetic value. Goltzius's contemporaries were aware of his physical attributes; therefore, the beautiful hand drawing would probably have been entangled with Goltzius's

⁴¹ See, for example, Haydon and Smith, 42–43; and Horn and Frohne, 17–21.

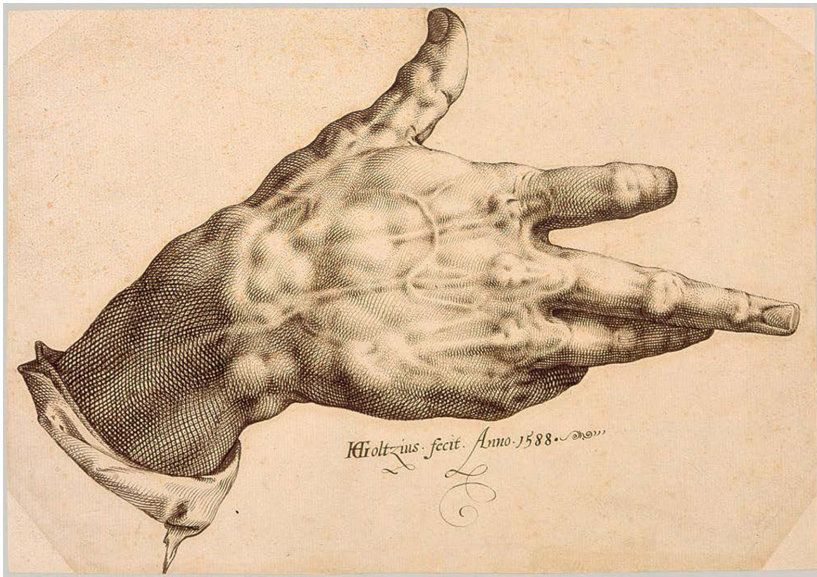


Figure 1. Hendrick Goltzius. *Goltzius's Right Hand*, 1588. Pen in brown ink. Haarlem: Tylers Museum. Image in public domain.

biography in the minds of early modern viewers. The drawing is inscribed “Goltzius fecit. Anno 1588” (“Goltzius made this in 1588”). There have been debates in the art historical literature about whether the hand should be identified as “the artist’s right hand” or “a right hand” by the artist.⁴² These debates affect the potential interpretation of the artwork. If the right hand is not Goltzius’s, it represents his artistic ability and general conceptions about the hand in this era. However, if it is indeed the hand of the artist, the work becomes a self-portrait and encapsulates his artistic identity.⁴³ It is impossible to conclude whether the drawing depicts Goltzius’s own right hand. Therefore, an alternative question might be how Goltzius’s contemporaries perceived the image and how they might have theorized it.

The term *the hand of the artist*, which was used frequently in this period, identifies the maker with their hand. In this term, the hand is a corporeal reminiscence of the making process that was often stripped of its physicality and came to represent *maniera*, the personal style identified with the artist. For Goltzius, drawing the right hand seems to have allowed him to unite his

⁴² For more context about this debate, see Leeftang and Luijten, 244–45; Van Thiel, 475–76; Nichols, 45n25.

⁴³ Lawrence Nichols, for example, states that the specificity of the execution and the detailed use of lines have portrait-like qualities: Nichols, 11.

physical hand with his *maniera* through a single object. Given his contemporaries' knowledge of his biography, it seems likely that, like most current scholars, they assumed that the depicted hand was Goltzius's. Therefore, the hand became a portrait of the artist, revealing his artistic identity.

Karen-edis Barzman effectively articulates the place of the hand in the theoretical conceptualization of early modern artmaking. Barzman discusses the theoretical work of Vasari as a foundation for early modern art, historical thinking, and writing. According to Barzman, Vasari framed *disegno* as a "complex activity based on intellection" that places artmaking within Aristotle's universal reason.⁴⁴ Thus, Vasari affirmed the noble status of artists while maintaining the art's position as manual production. This was crucial for securing artists' social status in early modern societal circumstances, in which physical labor was considered socially inferior. Relying on Aristotelian thinking enabled these attempts because "Aristotle had constructed the hands as the instrument and, indeed, the very sign of human intelligence and superiority in the animal world."⁴⁵ Goltzius and Van Mander were both aware of Vasari's theorization of art and worked to expand and nuance his project to include German and Netherlandish artists.⁴⁶ Reminiscent of Vasari's project in his *Lives*, Van Mander formed his *Schilder-boeck* to promote the liberal status of the visual arts. He further wished to establish the Northern tradition of art as equal to, yet different from, the Italian art tradition by highlighting characteristics of the Northern tradition, such as landscape painting and the development of oil painting that allowed the mirroring of nature through meticulously detailed depictions. In this project, Van Mander celebrated his intimate friend Goltzius for his inventive graphic work.⁴⁷ The concept of the hand as a symbol of the artist, central in Vasari's Aristotelian framing of art, is important in reading Goltzius's right-hand drawing.

Joseph Koerner also highlights the role of the hand in the early modern discourse of art. In his analysis of Albrecht Dürer's (1471–1528) depiction of his hand, he discusses Joachim Camerarius's (1500–74) preface to his Latin translation of Dürer's *Proportionslehre* (Four books on human proportion, 1528). Camerarius asks, "What single painter has there ever been who did not reveal his character in his works?"⁴⁸ He adds that "[Dürer's] hand so closely

⁴⁴ Barzman, 2000, 145.

⁴⁵ Barzman, 2000, 145.

⁴⁶ As Melion suggests, Van Mander emphasizes cultural differentiation and particular characteristics between regional communities that engage in exchange and mutual learning: Melion, 1989, 114.

⁴⁷ Hults, 373–75, 389.

⁴⁸ Koerner, 143.

followed the ideas of his mind that, in a moment, he often dashed upon paper, or, as painters say, composed, sketches of every kind of thing with pencil or pen.”⁴⁹ Koerner analyzes Camerarius’s question as expressing that “the artist’s hand is the privileged site of such interpretive displacements, such movements from art to artist, from created object to creative subject, for it is here that the artist’s body engages physically with the thing it produces.”⁵⁰ Camerarius conceived the painterly act in Neoplatonic terms as reflecting the beauty of the mind that conceptualized the painting. As Koerner correctly asserts, in this interpretation the hands are the gateway between the internal experience and the world.

In the early modern context, the hand becomes a synecdoche for the artist in general but is especially interesting in Goltzius’s case, since his hand was—figuratively and literally—central to his artistic and personal identity. The debate about the hand being Goltzius’s own hand or his depiction of another’s hand has engaged scholars as a means of interpreting the work and understanding his method. Scholars have alternatively discussed this drawing as a copy, a gesture to another artist, and a personal artifact. This drawing is also meaningful for understanding Goltzius’s artistic practice, and scholars have wondered if he used his right hand to produce this image from memory or painted it with his left hand using a mirror. The drawing, a finished and signed artwork, has become central to understanding his artistic activity. Linda Hults cites the plastic surgeon F. Groenevelt’s 1985 medical thesis, which attributes Goltzius’s hand malformations to a burn injury. The 2003 exhibition catalogue for *Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch Master (1558–1617): Drawings, Prints, and Paintings* also yields to Groenevelt’s diagnosis.⁵¹ Groenevelt supported his claim by analyzing the fingers’ position and identifying deformation of the nail bed. The catalogue writers thank Groenevelt “for his diagnosis and solution of an old art historical puzzle.”⁵² However, this analysis relies on an ink drawing without clear details of scar tissue. Moreover, a 1586–90 self-portrait (fig. 2) shows Goltzius’s fingers in a different position, casting doubt on the medical diagnosis. Scholars’ reliance on such medical opinion to resolve an art historical debate highlights the dominance of the medical model in art history and the need to incorporate disability studies perspectives. The reliance on the medical model tells a story of the body that moves between normal and abnormal, thus obscuring the complexity of (dis)ability experiences that are fluid and

⁴⁹Koerner, 145.

⁵⁰Koerner, 143.

⁵¹The exhibition was held jointly by the Rijksmuseum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Toledo Museum of Art. See Leeftang and Luijten.

⁵²Hults, 399n13; Leeftang and Luijten, 244–45, 326n25.



Figure 2. Hendrick Goltzius. *Self-Portrait*, 1586–90. Metalpoint, brush in gray-green on an ivory-colored prepared tablet. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London.

socioculturally dependent. The unifying characteristic of the medical model further steals the agency of disabled individuals and defines them as a problem that needs fixing. By relying on medical evaluation of artworks, scholars might lose sight of the comprehensive self-fashioning of disabled individuals.

Groenevelt's diagnosis joins a significant trend of medical doctors who retroactively diagnose the illnesses of artists based on their artistic production.⁵³ In some cases, these studies are effectively supported by historical evidence such as letters and medical records and are a valuable resource for many art historical studies, mine included. However, in many others, the analysis is based solely on the artist's works or self-portraits without considering artistic liberty, stylistic choices, or historical trends. Such studies narrow the artist's labor and meaning to a medical condition, attributing artistic decisions to decreased vision or mental health, for example. Furthermore, such studies disguise theory in a costume of scientific fact. The case of Groenevelt's declaration is different, as the artwork was diagnosed based on the artist's known bodily condition, but still without consideration of the role that manner played in this work. The curators

⁵³There are many examples of the application of this approach. A few examples include Capps; Collins; and Arshad and Fitzgerald.

wished to use this medical observation to conclude a long-lasting argument. However, while most scholars agree that the drawing depicts Goltzius's right hand and should be read as a form of self-portrait, this dispute was never resolved.

For example, Pieter J. J. van Thiel, who reviewed the 2003 exhibition on Goltzius, declares that "this finished drawing, proudly signed in full and dated 1588, is the ideal depiction of one of the wonders of God's creation, the human hand."⁵⁴ His attitude matches the conception of the artist's hand in early modern thought; however, his interpretation of the work is framed by a master narrative of disability as deficiency that inspires pity and shame, arguing that "it is ironic that this drawn hand, the showpiece of Goltzius's artistry at this point of his career, has been and is still taken for the artist's maimed hand."⁵⁵ Van Thiel reflects a pervasive view about disability and disabled people that assumes shame and embarrassment in one's disability. This ableist attitude conceptualizes a dichotomy between normal and abnormal and sees disabled individuals as broken, in contrast to the perception of nondisabled people as whole. And indeed, this harmful attitude is internalized by many disabled people who live their lives burdened by shame.⁵⁶

Those who preferred not to identify the hand drawing with Goltzius's own hand often chose to interpret it as a response to another artist's work, such as Michelangelo's sculpted hand of *Moses* (fig. 3) or Agnolo Bronzino's *Study of a Hand* (fig. 4),⁵⁷ the latter of which Goltzius did not necessarily have access to. The work also shares a significant resemblance to the depiction of hands in the works of Spranger and Van Haarlem; for example, Goltzius's 1588 *Fall of Phaeton* (fig. 5) after Cornelis van Haarlem shows a left hand in a manner resembling the hand drawing, with its extreme foreshortening and the elegant position of fingers. However, the hand in this image is a single, and even minor, detail in the overall composition, which includes a full figure, landscape, and other figures in the background—unlike the portrait-quality rendering of the drawn hand, which stretches across the paper.

It is indeed vital to read Goltzius's drawing of the hand through an art historical framework that considers both the rich artistic tradition in which he participated and this drawing's place within his broader corpus of work. I will therefore explore the role of the artist's physical hand as an emblem of artistic

⁵⁴ Van Thiel, 477.

⁵⁵ Van Thiel, 475–76.

⁵⁶ Michelle Mary Lelwica and Tobin Siebers discuss shame about disability as a social construct internalized by disabled people and its effect on many disabled people's sense of agency: Lelwica, 59–96; Siebers, 2008, 72, 118, 160–62. See also Davis, 6–7, 15–20.

⁵⁷ Leeflang and Luijten, 244; Van Thiel, 476; Nichols, 11, 45n25.



Figure 3. Michelangelo. *Moses* (detail, photo: Jörg Bittner Unna), ca. 1513–16. Marble. S. Pietro in Vincoli, Rome. Image in public domain.



Figure 4. Agnolo Bronzino. *Study of a Man's Right Hand*, ca. 1545–52. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Image in public domain.



Figure 5. Hendrick Goltzius after Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem. *Phaeton*, from “*The Four Disgracers*,” 1588. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Image in public domain.

identity and follow the motif of the hand in other works by Goltzius. The work was meant to be a thing of beauty, demonstrating Goltzius’s skill while simultaneously bringing to mind the making process; thus, the object represented is also the object’s source. As Melion suggests, the drawn hand is “positioned as if ready to wield the burin,” which Goltzius’s contemporaries would have likely assumed.⁵⁸

Goltzius’s larger-than-life-size depiction of his hand indeed resembles Michelangelo’s sculpted hand of *Moses* in its elongated fingers and prominent veins, with a slight resemblance in the fingers’ position as well. But its autonomy in the drawing and the foreshortening of the fingers into the white background do not give the sense of a fragment of the sculptor; they instead have a portrait-like quality. The drawing seems more at home with the tradition of artists emphasizing their hands in their self-depictions, such as Parmigianino’s ca. 1524 *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum,

⁵⁸Melion, 1993, 70.



Figure 6. Parmigianino. *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, ca. 1524. Oil on convex panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Image in public domain.

Vienna (fig. 6), and Albrecht Dürer's 1493 ink drawing *Self-portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow* (fig. 7), the second being by an artist that Goltzius studied closely as an exemplar.

Goltzius's earliest self-portrait, from the collection of the British Museum, joins this artistic tradition, showing the artist in half-length profile, looking right at the viewer with his left hand holding up a tablet and his right hand a burin. His right hand is at the forefront of the drawing, accentuated by the well-finished decorated sleeve of his elegant attire. This drawing is carefully finished, with even the detailed background completed, unlike many of Goltzius's other portraits on tablets. The right hand in this drawing is not in the same position as in the drawing of his hand, and the format does not allow the same attention to the texture of his hand as in his other drawing. Yet his profile position emphasizes his right hand, which holds his tools and underscores the importance of the hand for his self-fashioning.

The possibility of living in a disabled bodymind with a sense of completeness and pride is inconceivable to many nondisabled people, yet a close reading of Goltzius's self-fashioning opens a pathway for a different narrative. Despite Van Thiel's assumption, mentioned above, Goltzius's engagement with



Figure 7. Albrecht Dürer. *Self-Portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow* (recto), 1493. Pen and brown ink. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image in public domain.

the theme of the hand in other artworks suggests a self-perception that rejects the attribution of shame.⁵⁹ While it is tempting to think about his depiction of the hand in the context of the dominant Christian narrative of suffering and triumph, Goltzius's treatment of the hand motif suggests that he features its distinctiveness and exceptional ability instead of treating his hand as a barrier he had to overcome.

As the curators of the 2003 exhibition have shown, Goltzius created more than one drawing of the right hand, demonstrating personal investment in this

⁵⁹His attitude might be studied in comparison to works like Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* (ca. 1775), in the Tate Collection, or *Portrait of Thomas Inglefield* (1787) and Matthew Buchinger's *Self-Portrait* (1724), copies of which can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Such a comparison is beyond the scope of the current research.

motif. The curators further argue that the direction of Goltzius's hatching seems to be from lower left to upper right, implying that Goltzius was right-handed and used his impaired hand in his artmaking.⁶⁰ There is no scholarly agreement about Goltzius's process of drawing his hand. While the curators seem to support the idea that Goltzius drew his right hand from memory using the same hand, Melion, for instance, suggests that Goltzius might have painted his left hand using a mirror.⁶¹ The curators suggest that "the artist wanted to show what he was capable of, despite his deformity," but add that "perhaps Goltzius even benefited from the stiffness of his fingers in that it gave him a strong grip when engraving and drawing."⁶² While the exhibition's curators advance a narrative of overcoming, in which the artist achieved "technical perfection" *despite* his impairment,⁶³ they still acknowledge the possibility that Goltzius benefited from his impairment, learning to utilize his distinct bodily characteristic to achieve greater control of his artmaking technique. This can be read as a particular form of disability gain, particular to Goltzius's fashioning of his artistic identity. The curators further support the suggestion that Goltzius understood his drawing of the hand as a form of self-portrait, which could have been read as such by his contemporaries. And indeed, Goltzius seems to intentionally frame his right hand as a personal symbol and a particular marker of his personal and artistic identity.

This choice can be seen in his depiction of *Mucius Scaevola* (fig. 8) from the *Roman Heroes* series (1586), dedicated to Rudolf II. Goltzius depicts Gaius Mucius Cordus receiving the name Scaevola, meaning left-handed. Mucius demonstrated his bravery by protecting the Roman people from occupation by the Etruscan king Lars Porsena. Mucius volunteered to go into the enemy camp to assassinate Porsena but accidentally killed another person instead. After being captured, he informed the king that others shared his mission and that the brave

⁶⁰ Van Mander further supports this analysis, stating in his biography that Goltzius "through his great love of art got to etching in copper, he also tried with his bad hand to learn to engrave on copper, which he from the start managed so well that Cornhardt [Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert], who at the time lived four miles from there, wanted to take him on to learn engraving" ("doch heeft hem tot der lijftsamheyt begheven, en door groote Const-liefdicheyt is gheraecht aen het etsen in't coper, en versocht oock met zijn lamme handt in't coper te leeren snijden, t'welck hem soo in't beginsel gheluckte, dat Cornhardt doe ter tijt vier mijlen van daer woonende, hem begheerde aen te nemen te leeren Plaetsnijden"): Van Mander, 386 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 282^r).

⁶¹ Melion, 1993, 72.

⁶² Leeftang and Luijten, 245–46. Joanna Woodall, 222, makes a similar claim: "This tortured, inflexible hand that ultimately had the right shape and the strength to manipulate the burin in the heroic labour of producing prints."

⁶³ Leeftang and Luijten, 246.



Figure 8. Hendrick Goltzius. *Mucius Scaevola* from the *Roman Heroes* series, 1586. Engraving, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image in public domain.

Romans would not give up protecting their people. This was a moment of self-sacrifice, in which the hero burned his right hand to demonstrate that he, like his fellow Roman soldiers, was willing to suffer bravely.

The image shows Scaevola standing guard, looking to his right, outside the image frame, grasping his sword with his right hand. Goltzius conceals the Roman hero's left hand in deep shadows to emphasize the importance of the right hand. While the typological portrait draws the observer's attention, in the lower left corner of the second plane Goltzius depicted the crucial moment

in which Scaevola burned his hand on the sacrificial fire. A similar sacrificial fire will appear later in this essay, but that fire will mark the hand of another figure: the artist himself. Yet in the foreground of the current print, Scaevola holds the sword with his right hand—a fact that disconnects him from the narrative in which he sacrifices the ability to use his right hand by burning it. Therefore, his figure in the foreground is a typology of an ancient hero rather than an inherent part of the narrative depicted at the back of the image, in which Scaevola offers his hand to the fire. As will be discussed below, Melion, following Van Mander's footsteps, has already linked the figure of the Roman hero with the artist,⁶⁴ but not much attention has been given to the epitaph juxtaposed with this image.

On the margins of the engraving appears a text in Latin, by an anonymous hand, stating, "Because Mucius makes amends in the fire for his murder of the wrong man, he relieves the houses of Troy's descendants from the siege." The epitaphs in the series are aimed at Rudolf II, who receives a direct address in the engraving titled *Fame and History* (fig. 9): "Emperor, you too and your courage, your lineage, the illustrious name of your house and the German princes will be broadcast by inspired Posterity and Fame with her rapid flight over all the lands, seas, and stars." However, as Melion observes, the series glorifies the engraver along with its intended recipient.⁶⁵ This inscription, regardless of its author and Goltzius's potential involvement with the text, might offer a glimpse into the reception of Goltzius's hand: the epitaph asks, "If Scaevola achieved all this for his fellow citizens by sacrificing his right hand, what would he then achieve if Jupiter were to restore him without an injured hand?"⁶⁶ The image itself answers this reflection by glorifying Scaevola's sacrificial act. Scaevola's treatment of his right hand secured his place among the pages of history. He raises his sword with his right hand and thus forges a comparison between the Roman hero and Goltzius: one holds his right hand and his tools of war, while the other uses his burins to create this very image with his right hand.

It is not surprising that Van Mander, when referring to the *Roman Heroes* series in Goltzius's biography, features the image of Scaevola, the only one in this series mentioned by name in the text. According to Van Mander, when he first came to Haarlem, he saw "a large, oblong canvas in grisaille in oils by [Goltzius] with the history of the Roman who burns his hand, astonishingly well designed and executed," which "was made for a place in a room in a large, distinguished house in Haarlem, at the time the property of burgomaster Gerit Willmsen but now belonging to Goltzius, and it is, I believe, still there to be

⁶⁴ Melion, 1995a, 1106.

⁶⁵ Melion, 1995b, 118–19; Melion, 1995a, 1090–134.

⁶⁶ For this translation and a discussion of the series, see Leeflang and Luijten, 90–92.



Figure 9. Hendrick Goltzius. *Fame and History*, from the *Roman Heroes* series, 1586. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image in public domain.

seen.”⁶⁷ From this concise description, it seems that Goltzius produced another version of this narrative that focuses on the moment when Scaevola burns his hand. Following the early modern tradition of identifying with a namesake, usually a patron saint, Goltzius asserts his identification with Scaevola by displaying this scene in his house. In contrast to Van Thiel’s dismissive reaction to the claim that Goltzius’s drawing of the hand represents Goltzius’s own burned right hand, Goltzius’s identification with Scaevola implies his pride in his burned hand and the embodiment it produces.⁶⁸ Goltzius embraces this physical characteristic as a crucial part of his identity, while also reflecting on his potential achievements if his hand was restored, as implied by the epitaph of the engraving. Van Thiel correctly stated that this drawing represents “the ideal depiction of one of the wonders of God’s creation, the human hand”—but in this case, the celebrated wonder might well be an impaired hand.

TRAVELING TO ITALY, MASQUERADING, AND REVEALING IDENTITY

Late in October 1590, despite an illness that might now be described as chronic, Goltzius traveled to Italy to view its art with his own eyes.⁶⁹ Throughout his trip, which passed through Germany on the way to Italy, Goltzius assumed varied identities by disguising himself, especially when encountering other artists. By choosing when to hide and when to reveal his true identity, Goltzius actively fashioned himself in diverse social circumstances.

⁶⁷ “Doe ter tijt sagh ick oock van hem eenen grooten langwerpighen doeck van wit en swart, van Olyverwe, en was daer den Romeyn zijn handt verbrandt, wonder wel gheordineert en ghehandelt, en was gemaect nae een plaets in een Camer van een groot heerlijck huys, doe ter tijt den Borghermeester Gerit Willemsen te Haerlem, dan teghenwoordich Goltzio toecomende, en is als ick meen daer noch te sien”: Van Mander, 394, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fols. 284^r, 284^v). Hulst, following Melion, convincingly interprets Goltzius’s depiction of Scaevola’s narrative as evoking a parallel between the artist and the Roman hero. His identification with Scaevola’s sacrifice paints Goltzius as a heroic figure who sees his burned hand as a sacrifice for art. See Hulst, 378, 382–83; Melion, 1993, 70; and Melion, 1995a, 1106. Woodall analyzes Goltzius’s depiction of Goltzius’s 1589 engraving of *The Great Hercules*, which she interprets as combining political, philosophical, and personal elements. She makes an interesting connection between Goltzius’s embodiment, affected by fire, and Hercules’s tortured body at the end of his life: Woodall, 194–228.

⁶⁸ Scholars have only recently started to discuss the positive value of disability in the medieval and early modern context. Although such voices gradually become more prominent, there is still much work to be done. For some of the pioneering work that positively engages with disability, see, for example, Kaminska, 2024b; Hsy; Bearden, 70–120; Chess, 31–32.

⁶⁹ Van Mander describes an improvement in Goltzius’s health during his journey despite the travel’s hardships: Van Mander, 389–90 (*Schilder-boeck*, fols. 282^v–283^r).

Within this social performance, Goltzius's (dis)ability played a crucial role as an identifying marker. To understand Goltzius's experience of hiding and revealing his identity, I will analyze it in the context of self-fashioning and suggest that the identity fluidity he adopted during his trip also emerged in his art.

According to Van Mander, Goltzius wished to prompt unguarded reactions to his art and to hear rumors about himself from other painters and engravers. Van Mander writes that "in this world, it is often the practice or malpractice, that one speaks of someone who is absent somewhat more freely and with less respect or courtesy than in their presence because the presence of the person makes one more or less diffident; adulation, or the mighty art of flattery, is also far too common among people."⁷⁰ He further adds that, while some people considered Goltzius's behavior wrong, he heard Goltzius explaining the reason for his attitude and judged it sufficient to exonerate him.

Besides an acute observation of human nature, this idea might be another echo of the Vasarian narrative. In his biography of Titian, Vasari describes an alleged meeting between Titian, Michelangelo, and himself in Titian's Belvedere studio. In the studio, Vasari and Michelangelo witnessed the Venetian painter working on a painting of a nude woman representing Danaë. Vasari describes how, in the presence of Titian, both he and Michelangelo praised his artistic achievement, commenting "as one does in the painter's presence." However, Vasari recalls Michelangelo saying, as they exited the studio, that while the painter's coloring and manner are pleasing, it is a pity that he was not well trained in the art of *disegno*.⁷¹ In the sixteenth-century context, in which *disegno* was celebrated as "the father of the arts," such critique was especially offensive, implying that Titian's work could not achieve the perfection and originality that would allow it to surpass nature as Michelangelo had

⁷⁰ "Doch ist ter Weerelt veel een ghebruyck, oft misbruyck, datmen van yemant in't afwesen wat vryer, en met minder aensien oft beleeftheyt spreeckt, dan in teghenwoordicheyt, door dat des Persoons bywesen meer oft min doet schromen: oock is de smeeckerije oft vermoghende Vleyconst te seer ghemeeen onder den Menschen": Van Mander, 390 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283^r).

⁷¹ Vasari, 1996, 2:791–92. It might be interesting to consider Van Mander's description of Goltzius's *Danaë* as a response to this story. Van Mander describes it as "painted admirably fleshily and plastically . . . displaying great study of contours and structure," and concludes that "it is not to be improved upon in beauty of composition" ("dit naeckt is wonder vleeschachtigh en verheffende gheschildert, en van grooter studie in omtreck en binne-werck. . . . soo dat het oock van schoonheyt der ordinantie niet is te verbeteren"): Van Mander, 402 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 286^r). This description suggests that Goltzius possessed Titian's mastery of color as well as Michelangelo's command over *disegno*.

achieved with his own work.⁷² Van Mander was deeply familiar with Vasari's text, and, in fact, the third book of his *Schilder-boeck* is a carefully abbreviated Dutch translation of Vasari's 1568 edition.⁷³ Still, while this anecdote can be read as a literary tool to connect Goltzius's biography to Vasari's *Lives*, Goltzius's act of concealing his identity to expose his colleagues' unfiltered opinions of his art seems probable. I suggest reading the practice of disguise as an exploration of his embodiment and selfhood within the complex networks of early modern society.

Goltzius's practice of hiding his identity and connecting it with his hand is most prominent in Van Mander's description of Goltzius's travel to Southern Italy. To avoid thieves while traveling together from Rome to Naples, Goltzius, the silversmith Jan Mathijsen, and the young nobleman Philip van Winghen adopted disguises by wearing shabby-looking clothing. Goltzius introduced himself to his companions by the name Hendrick van Bracht, and they were unaware of his real identity. During their travel, Van Winghen corresponded with his friend, the Antwerpian geographer Abraham Ortelius. Among the letters he received, several mentioned the visit of the engraver Hendrick Goltzius to Italy. The letters mentioned "distinguishing features of his shape" and a "deformed right hand."⁷⁴ Philip van Winghen shared with Goltzius his eagerness to see the famous Hendrick Goltzius, without realizing that his travel companion was that same man. It is telling that Goltzius was described with direct reference to his hand as a revealing marker of his person. However, when, according to Van Mander, Jan Mathijsen identified Hendrick van Bracht as the disguised Hendrick Goltzius, Van Winghen disbelieved the claim and refused to accept that his friend Hendrick van Bracht was, in fact, the renowned artist, even when Goltzius endorsed this identification, saying, "It would be amusing, Mr. Van Winghen, if Goltzius walked here beside you."⁷⁵ Words alone did not satisfy Van Winghen, who expected to see a figure that matched the description

⁷² "Perché il Disegno, padre delle tre Arti nostre, Architettura, Scultura, e Pittura, procedendo dall'Intelletto": Vasari, 1966, 1:111. While encompassing the technical ability to draw, as discussed earlier, *disegno* served to justify the intellectual merit of art by bringing forth the imaginative and rational core of this process. Therefore, Vasari's anecdote implies doubt over the intellectual merit of Titian's work. See Williams, 30–33, 43–45; and Barzman, 2000, 145.

⁷³ Melion, 1989, 113–14. Goltzius was very likely informed regarding the Vasarian narrative through direct reading or through his interactions with Van Mander and their theoretical discourse in the Academy to Study After Life they co-founded.

⁷⁴ "daer by oock eenighe littecekenen van zijn gestaltnis en persoon, oock van zijn creupel rechter handt": Van Mander, 393 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283^v).

⁷⁵ "t'waer boerdigh Sr. van Winghen, dat Goltzius hier by u ginghe": Van Mander, 393 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283^v).

he received of Goltzius's shape and appearance, including his impaired hand; Van Winghen answered, "No . . . you are not him." Finally, Van Mander tells us, Goltzius reclaimed his identity by revealing to Van Winghen "his crippled right hand and also showed him his handkerchief which was marked with the same monogram which is on his prints, that is H and a G, entwined." Van Mander continues by stating, "When Van Winghen saw these evident marks of identity, he was speechless and turned pale and quickly jumped up and embraced Goltzius in a friendly and affectionate way."⁷⁶ Goltzius responded to the description offered by Abraham Ortelius by connecting his artistic identity—represented by the same monogram as on his prints—with his impaired hand as he extended it to his friend. This negotiation of identity concluded in a positive tone, with Van Winghen embracing Goltzius.

In contrast to this narrative, Van Mander records that Jan Mathijsen, now aware of Goltzius's identity, became an accomplice to his masquerading. When the two traveled to Venice, they heard a painter boasting, after hearing that Hendrick Goltzius was visiting the city, that he could identify Goltzius by his appearance. Unlike the story about Van Winghen's intelligence regarding Goltzius's hand, this anonymous artist presumed that the famous Goltzius would appear noble. When Jan Mathijsen, who was "tall and [had] a distinguished demeanor,"⁷⁷ joined Goltzius, playing the part of a more prominent figure, he was welcomed much more warmly than was Goltzius. He was invited to demonstrate his ability in drawing, which exposed the exchange of identities to the bitter surprise of the boasting artist. Goltzius's masquerading exploited society's expectations by allowing him to hide in plain sight, playing on the assumptions and biases of the people he encountered during his journey.

Goltzius's use of disguises during his trip to Italy demonstrates his understanding of and ability to navigate society's expectations and public signification. Many disabled individuals, including the author of this essay, experience the power of the curious gaze that serves as a reminder of their atypical physicality, especially in new social circumstances. Goltzius's encounters allowed him to transform the objectifying gaze into an interactive stare. He obscured his physical impairment by wearing gloves that hid his scars—utilizing conventional

⁷⁶ "Neen seyde hy, ghy en sijdes niet . . . stack zijn rechter crome handt uyt, toonende met eenen zijnen Neusdoeck, ghemerckt met het teycken dat op zijn Printen staet, te weten, H. en G. in een. Van Winghen dese soo claer litteekenen siende, werdt stom, en bleeck, en is haestlijck opgevlogen, omhelsende Goltzium met een vriendlijcke en hertlijcke maniere": Van Mander, 393 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283^v); Melion, 1993, 67. Barbara Kaminska points out that this narrative serves Van Mander in portraying Goltzius's constant control of his identity: Kaminska, 2024b, 620.

⁷⁷ "Ian lang en van stadigh aensien is": Van Mander, 394 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v).

early modern attire enabled him to control his social reception. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson theorizes the stare as an act of positive potential that restores subjecthood, different from the definition of the gaze as an oppressive form of looking that subordinates its object.⁷⁸ Goltzius's management of social encounters during travel regained his control over the stare and formed intimacy instead of alienation, enabling him to gain constructive knowledge of his reception. Through his attire, Goltzius was privileged to control who could see his physical atypicality and when. He manipulated his social interactions through performance, using costumes to articulate diverse social, cultural, and political positions, but also to disguise and later reveal his impairment. Accordingly, he redefined his body's relation to the world it inhabited. For example, Van Mander describes how Goltzius left his servant to play the role of the master while he remained anonymous.⁷⁹ This exchange enabled Goltzius to assume a position of lower socioeconomic status and experience its inherent invisibility.

John Martin's conceptualization of the self as a tension between external and internal selves assumes an aspiration to rise above one's current social position in order to belong to a predominant group.⁸⁰ This conjecture is complicated by Goltzius's decision to disguise himself as a person of lower social status in order to extract new knowledge. Tobin Siebers suggests observing disability as a masquerade, providing a productive framework for reading Goltzius's performances.⁸¹ Masquerade is the act of hiding and revealing

⁷⁸ Garland-Thomson, 2009, 3–11; 71–76.

⁷⁹ "Where he came to stay in the company of painters, and engravers and other artists, he got the servant to play the master and kept himself entirely incognito, learning in this way everything that they thought and hearing himself and his works criticized, which some did out of envy and some from a lack of insight, others with good reason; and these things amused Goltzius so that his health was completely restored. The servant would then be the guest or was entertained at the inn having invited the artists at the request of this master who (acting very unassumingly) hardly had any room to sit, and the servant sat at the head of the table and was thanked profusely for the wonderful reception he gave" ("daer hy by Schilders, Plaetsnijders, en ander Constnaren comend in gheselschap te logeren, dat hy den knecht liet den Meester spelen, hem houdende gantsch onbekent, vernemende in deser voeghen al t'ghene sy in't herte hadden, hoorende hem en zijn werck lasteren, som dit doende uyt afgonst, som uyt cleen verstant, ander met goede redenen, welcke dinghen Goltzio so vermaeckten, dat hy heel ghesondt is geworden. Dan was den knecht te gast, oft werdt in de Herbergh vergast, hebbende die van der Const genoodicht uyt begheerte van zijn Meester, die (hem heel cleen houdende) qualijck plaets om sitten hadde, en den knecht boven aen, wordende seer bedanckt van het goet onthael dat hy hun dede"): Van Mander, 389–90 (*Schilder-boeck*, fols. 282^v–283^r).

⁸⁰ Martin, 1997, 1311–14, 1325–26.

⁸¹ Siebers explains this term as developed from the existing discourse of the masquerade in feminist and queer studies. See, for example, Doane, 42–54; and Goffman, 79–81.

disability based on social circumstances. Siebers separates masquerade from “passing,” which is hiding personal qualities that society can view negatively. According to Siebers, passing preserves social hierarchies by presuming that individuals will always want to associate themselves with the dominant social group. He identifies fluidity in how individuals position themselves in relation to society for self-protection, gaining knowledge, and eliciting certain social reactions. He argues that masquerade allows for managing social stigma by controlling when to hide and when to reveal or accentuate a disability, and to what extent.⁸²

Van Mander describes Goltzius’s masquerade as a source of delight and amusement for the artist. However, Goltzius gained much more than pleasure in his masquerading; through the gossip and critique of other artists, he also gained knowledge about himself and his work. His performance demonstrates a deep understanding of what Siebers calls “complex embodiment,” which is “the possession and use of embodied knowledge” that can offer a remarkable insight into cultural and social realities.⁸³ Siebers theorizes the ability of the body to construct social experiences to the same degree that it is subjected to them. Influenced by the work of gender studies and critical race theory scholars, Siebers’s complex embodiment theory regards the body as responsible for human knowledge, human experience, and social activation.⁸⁴ Goltzius’s adoption of his servant’s identity and his performance of other identities—such as that of a guest in his own house, a German peasant, and a cheese merchant—during his journey can be read as a quest for social and professional knowledge. His manipulation of social circumstances shows his understanding of access to knowledge based on social position.⁸⁵ Goltzius’s performance shaped not only others’ reactions to him but also, as I will show, his own sense of identity.

⁸² Siebers, 2008, 101–10.

⁸³ Siebers, 2019, 39.

⁸⁴ Siebers, 2008, 25. Complex embodiment is defined in sharp contrast to what Siebers terms the “ideology of ability,” according to which the body should be fixed to meet the normalized model, leaving no room for human variations that do not meet this ideal: Siebers, 26, 25–27. The theory of complex embodiment also brings forward the role of intersectional identities in producing and shaping lived experiences. Instead of singling out the disability identity, complex embodiment theory considers how race, gender, sexuality, economic status, and age (among other identities) intersect with disability in producing an external reaction to the bodymind and as a result construct, affirm, or complicate the experience and self-perception of the individual.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, in a chalk self-portrait painted during his travel to Italy—now in the *Graphische Sammlung Albertina*, Vienna—Goltzius depicts himself in an oval frame, standing in profile but turning his face to the viewer; his elegant attire and manicured mustache and beard imply an elevated social status, projecting the identity of a cultivated gentleman. In this case, Goltzius’s painting operates as an unveiling of his identity. For a discussion of this portrait, see Nichols, 8–9.

Goltzius's experience demonstrates masquerading as an act of disguising and revealing to form and reshape relationships. Although his behavior could be read as misleading and dishonest, Van Mander maintains that Goltzius's outstanding love of art and sense of courtesy, honor, and respect allowed him to maintain his distance from worldly concerns and general gossip.⁸⁶ This report on Goltzius's virtue implies a difference between masquerading and dishonesty, endorsed by Martin's discussion of prudence and sincerity.⁸⁷ While Martin stresses the division between the internal and external of one's personality and orients the self toward climbing the social ladder, masquerading is an external performance that shapes the self. This includes embracing what Siebers refers to as "spoiled identities," stigmatized identities that as a result are considered less socially desirable.⁸⁸ The fluid performance of masquerading enables individuals to calculate their behavior based on the social responses they experience. These behaviors are learned, and social responses are internalized to shape the individual. The self is in a constant state of becoming as one occupies changing environments and encounters others. The act of being is, therefore, an act of becoming. Goltzius learned about himself as an artist by performing diverse identities, and used the knowledge he gained to shape his artistic identity and share his narratives of self with his biographer.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ "He is someone who does not concern himself in any way with worldly events and general gossip, for he is someone who, because of outstanding love of art, likes to have peace of mind, be quiet and solitary, while art has claimed the whole person for herself. He particularly loves his own freedom, and also courtesy and honour; he has 'Honour above Gold' as his motto, and in practice he shows plentifully that he strives not so much for money as for honour" ("Hy is een die hem der Weereltsche beroerten en t'gemeen gheclap gantsch niet bemoeyt, als een die uyt overtreffende liefde der Const geern rust-sieligh, stil, en alleen is, dewijl de Const den heelen Mensch tot haer vereyscht te hebben. Sonderlingh is hy een beminder van zijn eygen vrijheyt, oock der beleeftheyt, en eerbaerheyt seggende voor avijs, Eer boven Golt, en bewijst oock daedlijck genoech, niet soo gheltsuchtigh als eerliefdigh te wesen: doch hem veel cleender als prachtigh houdende"): Van Mander, 402 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 286').

⁸⁷ Martin, 1997, 1311–14, 1325–26.

⁸⁸ Siebers, 2008, 97; Goffman, 9–38, 100–10, 111–16.

⁸⁹ Dorothy Limouze complicates this assertion by suggesting that Goltzius's artistic fluidity and imitation practice should not be read as a singular and identifying characteristic and instead be understood as typical of engraving as a medium. Limouze encourages a careful reading of Van Mander to identify tropes that did not play a role in the artist's historical reality. I agree with the need to contextualize Van Mander's anecdotes and the literary tradition in which they were written, but Limouze's study dismisses Goltzius's agency in constructing his narrative. Even if varied anecdotes in the biography are indeed fiction, they still play an important role in constructing Goltzius's identity and should be examined as such. See Limouze, esp. 439, 450.

Van Mander demonstrates the fluidity of Goltzius's becoming by highlighting changes in Goltzius's health throughout his life up until the writing of his biography. Van Mander describes Goltzius's travel to Italy as restorative to his health but mentions that his old sickness reappeared as he returned home, suggestive of a connection between environment and health.⁹⁰ Although one must clearly distinguish between disability and sickness, Goltzius's health, along with his travel and interaction with places, artworks, and people, was a process of becoming the person depicted in Van Mander's biography at a certain time and place. Goltzius's prints demonstrate his chameleon ability to emulate other artists' styles while offering his own twist.⁹¹ Like his performances during his trip, his works exploit viewers' expectations. They demonstrate his talent for hiding and revealing his identity to extract information and establish his role in the hierarchy of art.

Van Mander illustrates Goltzius's persistent practice of artistic masquerading, describing how he "had very witty practical jokes played, in particular with the print of the *Circumcision* [1594] engraved in the style of Albrecht Dürer, and in which Goltzius's self-portrait appears" (fig. 10).⁹² This print includes Goltzius's self-portrait in the background, undisguising the origin of this artwork. According to Van Mander, Goltzius "burned out [his portrait and monogram] with a red-hot coal or iron and repaired again, after that, he smoked and crumpled it as if it were very old and had been on this earth for many years."⁹³ Unsurprisingly, Goltzius utilized fire to change the

⁹⁰ Van Mander describes the changes in Goltzius's health several times in his description of Goltzius's travel. Particularly significant to demonstrate this point is Van Mander's description of Goltzius's health directly after his return home: "But when [he] had been home a short time his previous illness returned again, for what reason I do not know, and it entirely overwhelmed him so that he became completely dehydrated" ("Doch weynigh tijts t'huys zijnde geweest, ick weet niet door wat oorsaek, is hem de voorgaende sieckte weder aengecomen, welcke hem heel t'onder heeft ghehouden, dat hy gantsch uytdrooghde"): Van Mander, 394 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 248^v).

⁹¹ Filedt Kok describes the flexibility and technical ability Goltzius demonstrated in a 1594 series dedicated to Duke Wilhelm of Bavaria. While his prints after the German masters were created to look older, as if created by the masters themselves, his variations on the Italian masters were meant to look contemporary, with their flowing lines and broader format. See Filedt Kok, 187.

⁹² "besonder met de Print der Besnijdenis, op de manier van Albert Durer gesneden, waer in comt Goltzjz conterfeytsel": Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v).

⁹³ "dit en zijn teycken liet hy met een gloeyende kool oft yser uyt branden, en weder lappen, de Print beroockende, en toemakende, ofse heel oudt en veel laren op de Weerelt hadde geweest": Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v).



Figure 10. Hendrick Goltzius. *The Circumcision*, from the *Meisterstiche* (masterpieces) series, n.d. Engraving, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image in public domain.

appearance of the print, disguise its maker, and obscure his identity. The print, marked by fire, continues the pattern of entwining fire with Goltzius's artistic identity.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v). It is also not a coincidence that Goltzius's treatment of his print in the style of Dürer resembles Michelangelo's treatment of his lost *Cupid* sculpture. As I have shown, Goltzius and Van Mander attempted to link Goltzius with Michelangelo's model. In Michelangelo's case, the artist wished to compete with the ancient masters. Goltzius is described as following the same practice but competing with masters of a closer period and in a different medium. On the *Cupid* sculpture, see Norton; and Melion, 1993, 65.

This print “was then displayed disguised and masqueraded in Rome, Venice, Amsterdam, and elsewhere, and was seen with great amazement and pleasure by the artists and connoisseurs.”⁹⁵ This allowed Goltzius to elicit public reactions and gain glory by competing with Dürer. The disguising of his print in the manner of the master he admired can represent Martin’s idea of self-fashioning, which is oriented toward climbing the social hierarchy.⁹⁶ The identification with those he perceived as leading the hierarchy of art contrasts with the downplaying of his economic position during his travels. Still, in both cases, his masquerading helped him expose unguarded reactions that offered useful knowledge for his personal and professional development. This diverse manipulation of his self-representation reveals Goltzius’s persistent fluidity of selfhood as an intentional exploration of his sociocultural position.

According to Van Mander, the *Circumcision* print was sold and resold several times, for high prices, to collectors who believed it to be a lost engraving by Dürer. While some suspected that it was made by Goltzius, critics of Goltzius’s works argued that his limited capacity could not compete with Dürer’s achievements. Therefore, they claimed that this work—“the best [print] by Dürer that had been seen”⁹⁷—must have been by Dürer and could not have been faked by Goltzius. Finally, Goltzius exposed the work in its entirety, freshly printed, with his self-portrait and monogram visible, ending the rumors about its origin.

This was not a singular undertaking; Van Mander claimed that producing works attributed to other artists became a constant practice for Goltzius. He did the same with a print of the *Three Magi* attributed to Lucas van Leyden. According to his biographer, Goltzius continued to produce prints in the styles of Dürer and Van Leyden. Despite the variation of upward/downward masquerading, his decision to disguise his style by emulating other artists functioned similarly to his disguises during his journey to Italy, by prompting reactions from viewers that revealed their true taste and appreciation of his work.⁹⁸ Indeed, Van Mander wittily states that those disguised prints were

⁹⁵ “Dese Print dan dus gaende vermomt en in mascarade, te Room, Venetien, Amsterdam, oft oock elder, was by den Constenaren en verstandighe Liefhebbers met groot verwonderen en behaghen geern ghesien”: Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v) (translation mine). He continues to say that it was viewed with great admiration and pleasure by knowledgeable artists and art lovers and obtained high value.

⁹⁶ Martin, 1997, 1311–14, 1325–26. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of *Renaissance Quarterly* for their insight.

⁹⁷ “jae was wel t’beste, dat sy van Albert Durer hadden gesien”: Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v).

⁹⁸ For further discussion of Goltzius’s practice of emulating other artists see Melion, 1989, 119–20.

published in masquerade (“vermomt en in mascarade”). Interestingly, Van Mander further writes that “when Goltzius returned from Italy, he had impressed the handsome Italian paintings as firmly in his memory as in a mirror [*als in eenen spiegel*], so that wherever he went, he still saw them continuously before him.”⁹⁹ Although Van Mander refers to the Italian artworks, the same can be said of his engagement with the works of the Northern masters. During his voyage to Italy, Goltzius painted portraits of Northern and Italian artists, entwining them as a single community crossing national boundaries.¹⁰⁰ He contained within himself this commitment to the fusion of styles and attitudes that bridged the divide between Northern and Italian art. Not only did Goltzius remember the artworks he encountered, but they became part of his sense of self. In himself (as if reflecting from a mirror), he saw this variety of images and styles and made them part of his artistic identity.

Goltzius’s artistic masquerade, like his disguises during his journey, was a means of learning that enabled him to adjust to public taste and social circumstances. As Van Mander describes it, “Some who felt that Goltzius should be scorned and condemned with regard to his art, set him above both the best old masters and himself without realizing it.”¹⁰¹ While claiming that Goltzius could never compete with masters like Dürer and Van Leyden (not knowing that the prints were, in fact, by Goltzius), these critics judged them to be the best that Dürer and Van Leyden ever produced—and, consequently, glorified the engraver and established his social and artistic claim.¹⁰² Goltzius’s masquerading marks an emerging chameleon identity, or, as Van Mander frames it, his becoming “a rare Proteus or Vertumnus in art.”¹⁰³ By identifying

⁹⁹ “Goltzius comende uyt Italien, hadde de fraey Italische schilderijen als in eenen spiegel soo vast in zijn ghedacht ghedruckt, dat hyse waer hy was noch altijts gestadich sagh”: Van Mander, 401 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 285^v).

¹⁰⁰ Hults, 384; Van Mander, 393 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 283^v).

¹⁰¹ “Want sommighe die Goltzius in zijn Const meenden versmeden oft verachten, hebben onbewist hem boven de oude beste Meesters, en boven hem selven ghestelt”: Van Mander, 397 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 284^v).

¹⁰² Van Mander, 397–98 (*Schilder-boeck*, fols. 284^v–285^v).

¹⁰³ “Goltzius eenen seldsamen Proteus oft Vertumnus te wesen in de Const”: Van Mander, 398 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 285^v). Melion interprets Van Mander’s Protean metaphor as a comment about the artist’s talent at assimilation (which he understands to be characteristic of the artistic trade), in which artists, in general, are required to perform changes to their materials, appearance, and social profile. For Melion, Van Mander constructs Goltzius’s biography to serve as an exemplar of this quality. I agree with the implications he suggests regarding the artists’ community at large. However, especially when referring to artists’ appearances and social profiles, I argue that Goltzius’s fluidity of self-representation has unique characteristics because of his intentional movement down the social scale to gain knowledge. See Melion, 1989, 115. Huigen Leeftang

Goltzius with the two shape-shifting mythological entities, Van Mander defines the artist's stylistic fluidity as his particular characteristic and a cohesive identity in itself. This shape-shifting quality marked his ability to "transform himself to all forms of working methods."¹⁰⁴ This ability to transform his working method will be at the heart of this article's final section, in which I will discuss Goltzius's unusual painterly technique and its meaning for his intentional self-fashioning.

ARTISTIC IDENTITY ACROSS MEDIA

Goltzius's manipulation of media and technique was crucial in his deliberate identity formation. He handed over his publishing studio to his stepson, Matham, in 1598. This occasion marks Goltzius's move to pursue painting at the age of forty, and he seems to have concentrated his efforts on painting from 1600 until his death in 1617, although he still produced designs for Matham.¹⁰⁵ Despite moving from engraving to painting, the pen remained Goltzius's preferred instrument throughout his career. Goltzius did not only explore the boundaries of his art by emulating the works of other masters. He also investigated the boundaries of artistic media by creating artworks that defy classifications of genre and medium. By analyzing two later works by Goltzius—which share the title *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze* (*Sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus*)—in which painting masquerades as engraving, I will show the distinct role of his fluidity as an artist in shaping an artistic identity that celebrates his atypical body.

Different scholars have scrutinized the role of media and techniques in expressing artists' identities. According to Philip Sohm, for example, details of artists' palettes depicted in self-portraits might serve as clues for the viewer about the artist. The palettes can indicate skill level, aspiration, professional ancestry, character, and school. Sohm suggests that artists' palettes depicted in paintings can be read as self-declarations or self-portraits, like coats of arms. He further argues that tilting the palette toward the viewer in many such paintings is an invitation to observe it closely and disclose some of the artist's secrets of coloring.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the elusive notion of style can indicate an association

points out that Van Mander was not the first to identify Goltzius with the shape-shifting entities. This comparison is already present in the Latin dedication of Goltzius's *Birth and Early Life of Christ* (1594) to Wilhelm V of Bavaria (1548–1626), composed by Cornelius Schonaeus (1540–1611), rector of the Latin school in Haarlem. See Leeftang, 255.

¹⁰⁴ "met hem in alle ghestalten van handelighen te connen herscheppen": Van Mander, 398 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 285^v).

¹⁰⁵ Filedt Kok, 160, 195.

¹⁰⁶ Sohm, 995, 1003, 1005–07.

with a certain school or mark the artist's encounters with other styles. Indeed, as noted above, Goltzius's encounters with other artists, works, and styles left an imprint on his very being, preserving the art he witnessed in his mind and sense of self, so that he could continue observing it as if observing his reflection.

Considering the artist's artmaking process—or the artist's hand—as represented by the palette, the finished artwork can be regarded as a residue of an artmaking performance, which, to follow Cooper's logic, is part of the ongoing fluid meshing and entanglement of artists with the world.¹⁰⁷ But it is also an identity marker, bearing the life story of the artist—their training, travels, locality, and connections. The design and brush strokes might point to a commitment to *disegno* or *colore* (the priority and mastery of the use of color, often associated with the art of Venice), both of which had local connotations. Artistic identity or style involves a dynamic intra-action between the artist's bodymind interacting with their tools and materials. Even when using the same tools as others, intra-actions generate the artist's evolving identity, reflected in their style. It might also result in intentional ambiguity and playfulness, as in Goltzius's case. Goltzius explored his place and defined his artistic legacy by interacting with the works of artists he admired, challenging the limits of artistic media, amplifying the size of his prints, and employing the ideal of *teyckenconst* in painting.

In describing Goltzius's career as a painter, Van Mander highlights the artist's ingenious technique of drawing with a pen on a canvas primed with oil color. His mythological subject matter echoes the hybrid technique that defines his visual rhetoric. Van Mander describes a painting in this technique that he titles *Bacchus, Ceres and Venus*, which is most likely the 1600–03 version of *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze* (fig. 11), now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The painting alludes to a sentence from the comedy *The Eunuch* by the Roman dramatist Terence, written in 161 BCE, indicating that without food (symbolized by Ceres, the goddess of agriculture) and wine (symbolized by Bacchus, the god of wine), love (Venus) would grow cold. Goltzius depicts Venus nude from her waist up, with pearls around her neck and interwoven in her intricate braid. She wakes up from slumber and is surrounded by three figures: next to her left shoulder is a male figure with horns who bends over her, holding grapes and smiling deviously.¹⁰⁸ In front of him and to the right is the figure of a young satyr with parted red lips, who smiles adoringly toward Venus while cradling fruits in his garment. Venus, in return,

¹⁰⁷ Cooper, 46–47.

¹⁰⁸ Nichols identifies this figure as Bacchus, describing a tradition of depicting Bacchus with horns in the sixteenth century: Nichols, 40–41.



Figure 11. Hendrick Goltzius. *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze*, 1600–03. Ink and oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Image in public domain.

directs her sleepy gaze at him and lays her left hand on his shoulder. At the forefront of the painting, Venus's right hand caresses the wings of Cupid, whose body turns toward his mother, but his face is directed invitingly at the viewer. He holds his bow in his left hand, which stretches behind his back; in his right hand, he holds a torch that highlights the painting in soft shades of yellow, orange, and red.

Goltzius's use of lines and a grey palette with only minor colorful accents masquerades the painting as an engraving. He stretches the boundaries of his artistic practice and subverts the viewer's expectations with his grisaille painting technique, in which the scene is composed of cross-etchings in black pen to construct volume and depth. His reliance on lines rather than on color to

achieve the effect of depth is especially prominent in his painterly technique. The paint, in contrast, is used to construct the luminosity of the work. Although adopting the visual language of engraving, his piece emulates the distinct internal glow of Federico Barocci's paintings, which he admired during his trip to Italy. The painting's artistic medium is thus called into question. Unsurprisingly, Van Mander emphasizes the wonder of the emperor, who owned this painting, regarding Goltzius's unusual technique. According to Van Mander, the emperor invited connoisseurs to view the painting and ponder the artist's means of production.¹⁰⁹ The ambiguous nature of his technique called for close observation of the relationship between lines and colors, thus positioning Goltzius in relation to the sixteenth-century discourse of Italian art and reaffirming his place within the artistic community. But Goltzius's work moves beyond the discourse of *disegno* versus *colore* by introducing him as a master of *teyckenconst.*

Goltzius's artistic disguises and his disguises during his journeys through Germany and Italy were parallel opportunities to learn from other artists through the emulation of style and through unguarded critiques. His disguises, then, enabled the development of his rich artistic identity—which is remarkably noticeable in this painting. His painterly style in the works discussed in this section is characterized by immense complexity and attention to object volume, with multiple networks of cross-hatching that increase and diminish in thickness and density to define depth, reproducing the effect of engraving. His virtuosic works are often on a large scale, allowing for intricate details. Lawrence Nichols observed that, while Goltzius's drawing technique of emulating engraving can be observed in earlier examples, his adoption of large scale pushes the boundaries of the medium and produces a distinct utilization of this genre.¹¹⁰ Hence, Goltzius challenged the possibilities of both engraving and painting by blurring the lines between these media.

Goltzius further articulates his identity in a later version of the same topic, in which he explores his embodiment by introducing a self-portrait into the

¹⁰⁹ "Afterwards the Emperor obtained it, who was most astonished by the technique, and how it was done, calling in some practitioners of art who were also amazed—for it is very interesting and effective to look upon" ("Na der handt creegh hem den Keyser, die over desen handel hem heel verwonderde, doe dit gedaen was, roepende daer over eenige van der Const, die oock verwondert waren: want het heel seldsaem en wercklijck te sien is"): Van Mander, 398 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 285^v).

¹¹⁰ According to Nichols, "in Italy, Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529–92) produced works of this kind, while in the Netherlands Jan Wierix (1559–1615 or later) and Hieronymus Wierix (ca. 1553–1619), for example, executed small-scale drawings that resemble engravings": Nichols, 10.



Figure 12. Hendrick Goltzius. *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze*, 1605. Pen in brown and reddish-brown ink over red chalk on off-white prepared canvas. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Image in public domain.

mythological scene. In his 1605 painting of the same title, today in St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum (fig. 12), four putti uncover the scene by holding back a canopy to reveal several full-size nude figures. Ceres is seated at the forefront of the painting with her back to the viewer, and her right hand is leisurely lying on the thigh of Bacchus, who is sitting in three-quarters view with his face in profile, looking at Venus. Next to Ceres, a young faun is eating grapes with apparent pleasure. Venus reclines her sensuous body toward Bacchus and smiles at him. Nichols identifies this painting as the unfinished work mentioned by Van Mander as depicting several large nude figures that “should excel all his

previous pen-work.”¹¹¹ In this version of *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze*, Goltzius introduces another variation in his painterly technique. This time, he draws in pen, using brown and reddish-brown ink over red chalk on an off-white prepared canvas. With this increasingly limited use of color, Goltzius reinforces the place of *teyckenconst* in his painterly pursuits.

While this painting is rich in detail and demonstrates the versatility of Goltzius’s technique, the most interesting for understanding Goltzius’s identity formation is his self-portrait in the background, next to Cupid, depicted here as an adolescent who pokes an altar fire. Goltzius depicts himself with a meticulously groomed mustache and beard, and clad in voluminous attire; he meets the viewer’s gaze with intensity. Notably, he holds his burins in his left hand, leaving his right hand—his primary artistic tool—free to hover near the sacrificial flame, evoking the story of Scaevola and subtly referencing his own childhood injury (fig. 13), a detail previously observed by other scholars.¹¹² Still, I suggest a new interpretation of this detail. By inserting his portrait into this painting and connecting his portrait to the fire, Goltzius offers an allegorical link between love nurtured by food and wine and his art nurtured by the flames that inflicted the impairment on his hand.¹¹³ He again stresses the crucial role of his burned hand in fashioning his identity, demonstrating his pride in his singular embodied experience. This painting joins the pen drawing of his right hand and Van Mander’s emphasis on the hand to reveal Goltzius’s atypical embodiment as a source of pride and as a nurturing power to his artmaking.

¹¹¹ “He still has a very large canvas in hand with which it has already been busy for a long time, and some large nudes are said to appear in it, these should excel all his previous pen-works, insofar as I can tell via the grapevine; but I myself have not seen any trace of it as I ought to have done should I wish to write about it with any certainty; but he does not like to show anyone his unfinished works, although he shows them gladly to anyone who wishes to see them when they are completed; in this way and in other ways he is just like the excellent Michelangelo” (“Noch heeft hy onder handen, daer hy nu langen tijt over doende is gheweest, eenen heel grooten doeck, daer eenighe groote naeckten in soudén comen, en soude alle zijn voorgaende Pen-wercken te boven gaen, als ick gheruchts wijse eenichsins can vernemen: doch ick hebber geen begin af ghesien, als ick wel behoorde, om yet sekens daer van te schrijven: dan hy laet noode zijn dinghen onvolmaect yemant sien, dan voldæen zijnde geern yeghelijcken wie wil: in dat en anders ghelijckende den uytmemenden Michael Agnolo”): Van Mander, 401 (*Schilder-boeck*, fol. 285^v). See also Nichols, 1992, 17–18.

¹¹² Scholars have connected the proximity of Goltzius’s hand to the fire with his childhood injury and with his interest in alchemy. Most commonly, they interpret his proximity to Cupid as a comment about Goltzius’s tools of artmaking being tools of love that, like Cupid’s arrow, have the power to induce the viewer to love Goltzius’s exceptional *penwerck* (pen-work). See Nichols, 38, 52n130; Hulst, 392; Melion, 1993, 69–70; and Melion, 2017, 169.

¹¹³ Woodall comes to a similar conclusion in her analysis of *The Great Hercules*, arguing that fire is both a destructive and a constructive force: Woodall, 194–228.



Figure 13. Hendrick Goltzius. *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze* (detail), 1605. Pen in brown and reddish-brown ink over red chalk on off-white prepared canvas. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Image in public domain.

Hults suggests that Goltzius replaced his practice of engraving with that of painting later in life to compete with the new ideals of art he encountered in Italy, following what she refers to as the early modern hegemonic masculine values shaped by “social rank, age, and the values and standards of professions, such as the elevated artistic expectation that influenced [Goltzius].” She adds that to establish his place in a field that valued painting as the highest art—an idea promoted by Van Mander—Goltzius had to adjust his artistic practice from engraving to

painting.¹¹⁴ Melion, in contrast, convincingly argues that Van Mander aimed to narrate parallel histories of art to articulate crucial differences between Florentine and Dutch art through the history and practice of *teyckenconst*. Melion shows that Van Mander focused his comparison on Michelangelo and Goltzius to contrast Michelangelo's privilege of the eye as the gateway to the mind over the laborious hand—as claimed by Vasari and Gian Paolo Lomazzo—to Goltzius's inventive burin-hand.¹¹⁵ I argue that instead of competing with the Italian ideal, Goltzius's manipulation of the painterly practice demonstrates an investment in his fluid identity and ability to emulate and surpass both the Italian and Dutch masters through the practice of *teyckenconst*. His identity is entwined with the constantly shifting fire that affects his embodiment and his experiences in the world. Goltzius's identity is inextricably linked with the transformative power of fire, which reshaped his physical embodiment and mediated his sociocultural engagements.

CONCLUSION: ARTMAKING AS EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

When considered together from the perspective of critical disability theory, Goltzius's biography and artworks tell a story of intentional self-fashioning rooted in embodied experience. The institutions that defined Goltzius's life, foremost his professional affiliation, affected his sense of self, as Greenblatt and Martin suggest.¹¹⁶ However, his embodiment, as constructed in text and images, is vital to understanding his identity formation. Scholars engaging with questions of (dis)ability, as well as gender and race, might find the analysis of Goltzius's active and intentional self-fashioning helpful in observing self-fashioning through verbal and visual rhetoric. By observing the workings of (dis)ability in Goltzius's life and work, it is possible to better understand the varied ways in which early modern individuals defined their relationships to the world. Through Goltzius's example emerges the question of how early modern individuals interpreted and negotiated social reactions to (dis)abled bodyminds. When did they choose to perform difference, and when did they obscure it? How did they adjust themselves, and when did they decide to resist sociocultural expectations? What new knowledge did they develop about the world and their place within it? How did they utilize this knowledge?

Goltzius's atypical embodiment prompted social reactions, as implied by the letter from Abraham Ortelius to Van Winghen that emphasized Goltzius's distinct appearance and impaired hand. His use of disguises and aliases during his trip to Italy may possibly have been infused with his knowledge of the social reaction to his appearance. Goltzius utilized this knowledge to subvert people's

¹¹⁴ Hults, 391–92.

¹¹⁵ Melion, 1993, 65–67.

¹¹⁶ Greenblatt; Martin, 1997.

expectations and extract information about the reception of his art to which he would not be privy otherwise. Goltzius framed his (dis)ability as gain by connecting his atypical hand with his artistic identity. In the drawing of his right hand, the hand functions as a self-portrait and encapsulates his main instrument of artmaking and its sociocultural meaning. The same attitude emerges in his self-portrait in the 1605 *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze*, in which the flames caress his right hand to form an allegory of the revitalizing power of fire to his art. Goltzius's art, through which he shaped and reshaped himself, is an intra-action of the meshing of his body with the world. With it, he blurred the boundaries between artistic methods, creating artworks that, like himself, defied social expectations and embodied fluidity between genres and media.

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