

Artist: Matheu Wijtmans (signed bottom right)

Title: *"Lady Playing and Dog Dancing"*

Medium: Oil Painting on Panel

Acquisition Number: 1653

Collection: Iziko South African National Gallery: Bailey Collection

Introduction

In the 1940's Sir Abe Bailey bequeathed over 400 artworks to the South African National Gallery, which significantly enriched the collection. There is a severe backlog of conservation work that needs to be done on the paintings from the Bailey collection, and due to the size of the collection, the conservation process has been slow. The Sir Abe Bailey trust continues to support the conservation department in its work with the collection. The Bailey collection is most well-known for its portraits and sport paintings which (mostly) date from the 18th and 19th Centuries (Proud, n.d).

According to a label on the back the painting was bequeathed to the SANG in 1940 (Figure 1). This is one of the few paintings in the Bailey collection which falls outside of the sporting and portraiture genres, and it is also one of the few paintings in the collection which is not painted by a British artist: Thus it falls within the "miscellaneous" group in the Bailey collection (Tietze, 2008).

On most paintings in the Bailey collection evidence of damage is apparent upon inspection. During the Second World War, the collection was sent to the countryside for safe keeping, and the paintings were probably stored in unsatisfactory conditions. However if these paintings had not been moved they would not have been here today, as Bailey's home was completely destroyed during the blitz (Zehnder, 2014).



Figure 1

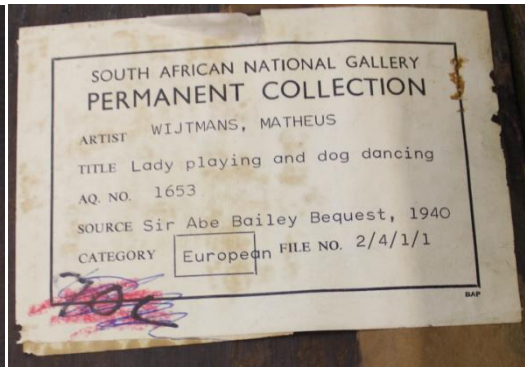


Figure 2

The subject of this condition report, *Lady Playing and Dog Dancing* by Matheus Wijtmans is an oil painting on a dark oak panel. Wijtmans is a relatively unknown artist from the Netherlands who lived from 1650 to 1689. The painting falls into the Genre Painting category, which was concerned with portraying everyday life and customs in the Netherlands. While most of the subjects in the paintings portrayed in 17th Century Dutch Genre painting were considered modest, the subject in this painting are depicted more lavishly through their ornate clothes and their bountiful surroundings. The central woman figure wears a beautifully ornate dress, while playing a lyre, neither of which would have been available to the more modest folk of the Netherlands (Tietze, 2008).

The subject of this condition report, "*Lady Playing and Dog Dancing*" by Matheus Wijtmans is an oil painting on a dark oak panel. Matheus Wijtmans was born in Den Bosch, The Netherlands, in 1638 and passed away in Utrecht in 1689. Wijtmans was taught by Hendrik Verchung, a painter from Gorcum. When Wijtmans moved to Utrecht he became a student of Jan Bijlert, who had spent some time studying painting in Italy. This is interesting because an Italian influence is obviously visible in the work of Wijtmans. Wijtmans is a relatively obscure painter, with only 15 known paintings. Despite this, his paintings can be found in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, the Gemaldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, and the Louvre in Paris (Gouden Eeuw, n.d.).

2. M. Wijtmans - Lady playing and dog dancing
Oil on panel 62.5 x 45 cm
Acq. No.1653
Sir Abe Bailey Bequest

This painting was covered with a very old yellow varnish which had gone mat, so that it was very difficult to see the painting properly.

The old varnish was removed and at the same time also the old retouchings. The painting was retouched where necessary and finally it was re-varnished again.

This painting was put on exhibition at the Michaelis Gallery, Greenmarket Square, during December 1974 and January 1975.

Report by E.C.L. Bosman
Dec 74 / Jan 1975

Figure 3: A condition report from 1975 by E.C.L. Bosman which was discovered in the painting's folder.

Provenance

An old condition report states that the painting was exhibited on loan to the Michealis Gallery in December 1974 and January 1975, before the Michealis Gallery and the South African National Gallery were the same entity.

A preliminary Google search on Matheus Wijtmans has not yielded very much information on the artist, except that he was a student of Hendrik Verschuring and Jan van Bijlert. (Houbraken, 2009)

Dimensions

The original panel measures at 625 x 450 millimetres, with a depth of 7 millimetres. The complete artwork, including its frame, measures at 830 x 655 millimetres, with a depth of 60 millimetres.

Materials

It could be assumed that the artist used Oak as the primary support panel because painting on oak was most common with the Dutch painters of the 17th Century. According to Hayden Proud the frame is a replica basket frame. A label found on the back of the artwork proves that the frame is made from pear wood. This frame replaced an unsuitable English gilded frame which came with it when it was bequeathed. The frame is still in a very good condition and suits the painting well.

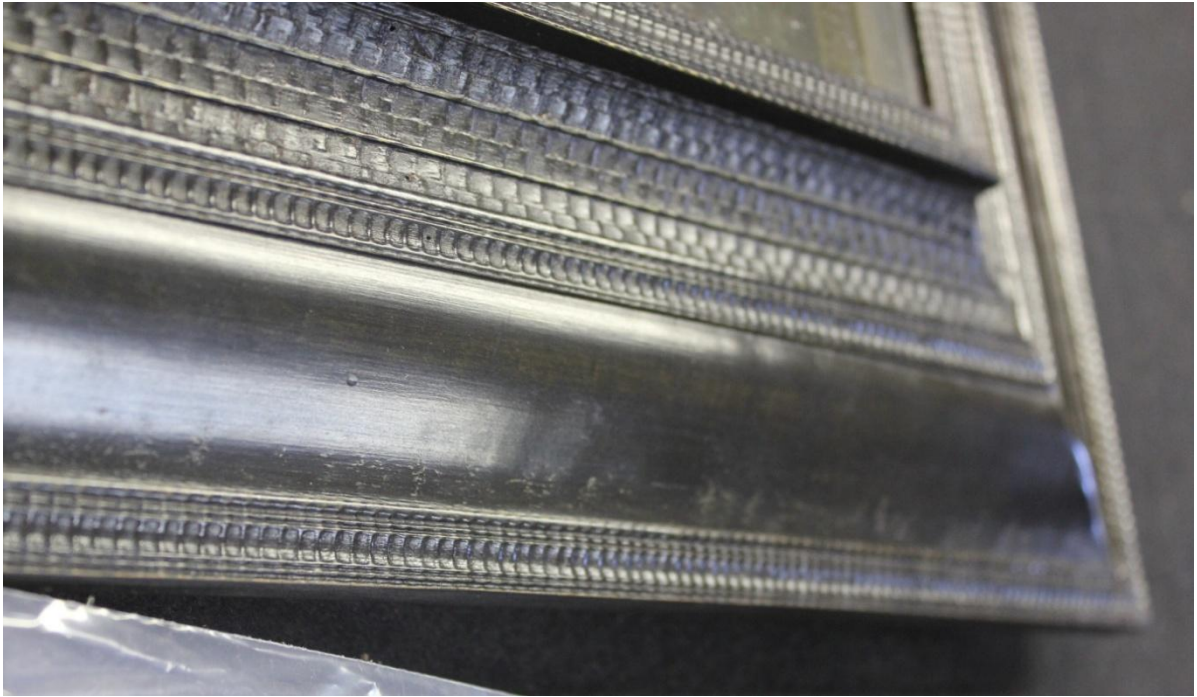


Figure 4: Basket Frame

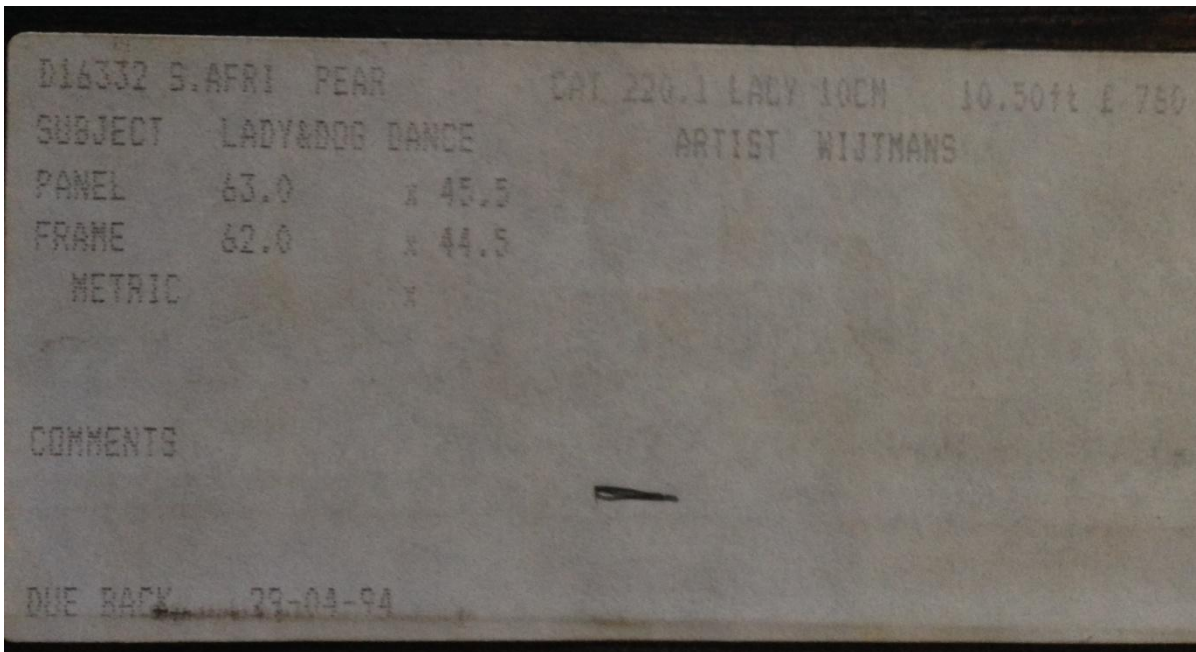
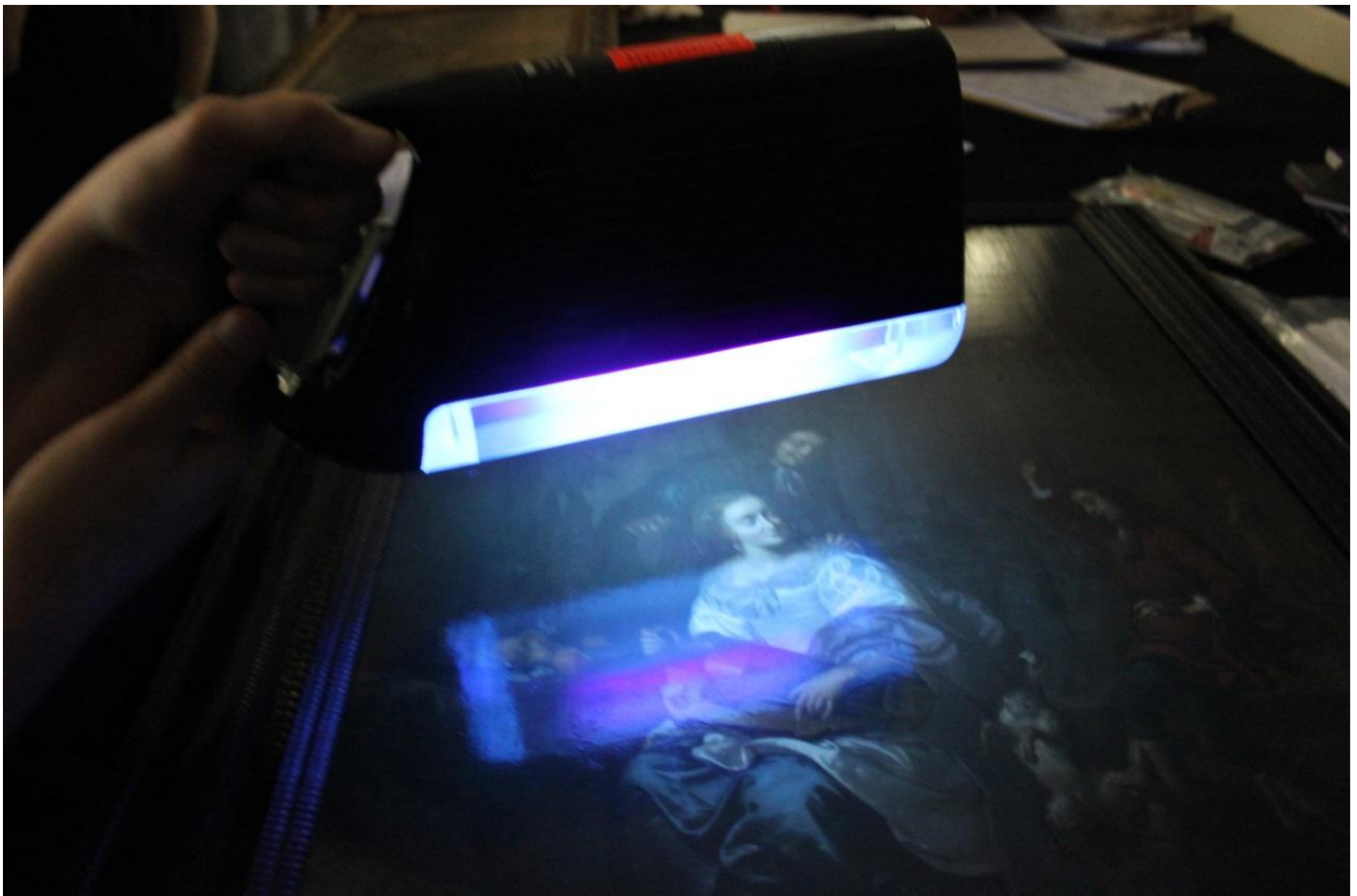


Figure 5: Label from pear wood frame's manufacture, which was commissioned by Hayden Proud in 1994.

Observation Under Ultraviolet Light

Examination under UV light shows no evidence of retouching or over-painting: the restoration referred to in the old condition report (figure 3) was very well done. The white pigment appears luminescent under UV light which proves that the original natural varnish has been removed and new varnish had been added.

Figure 6: Examination under UV light



Dirt

There are numerous water droplets on the surface. This could most certainly be condensation from a faulty air-conditioning. (See figures 7&8) There is a residue on the surface in the form of wipe marks, mostly towards the lower half of the painting. The surface of the painting is very dusty. This should be resolved with adequate cleaning.

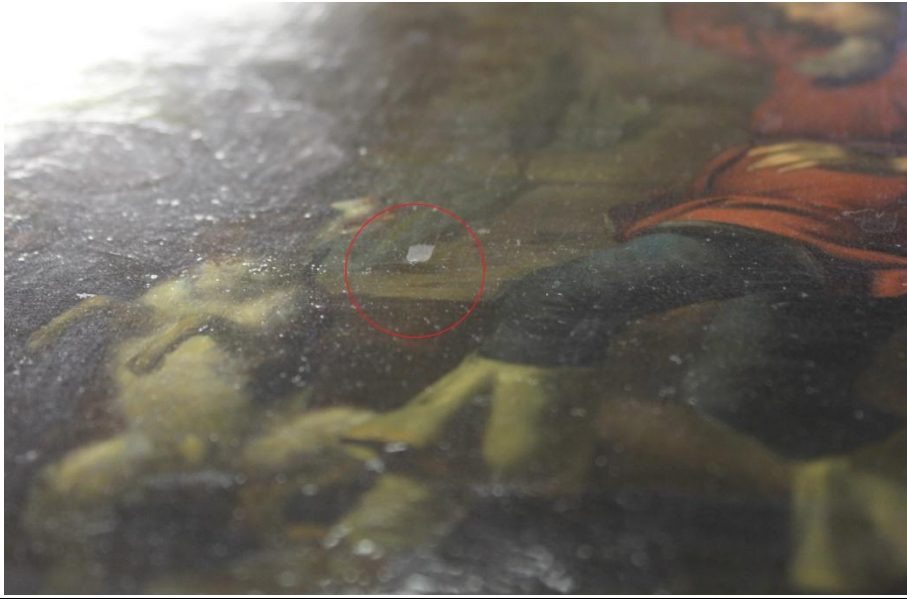
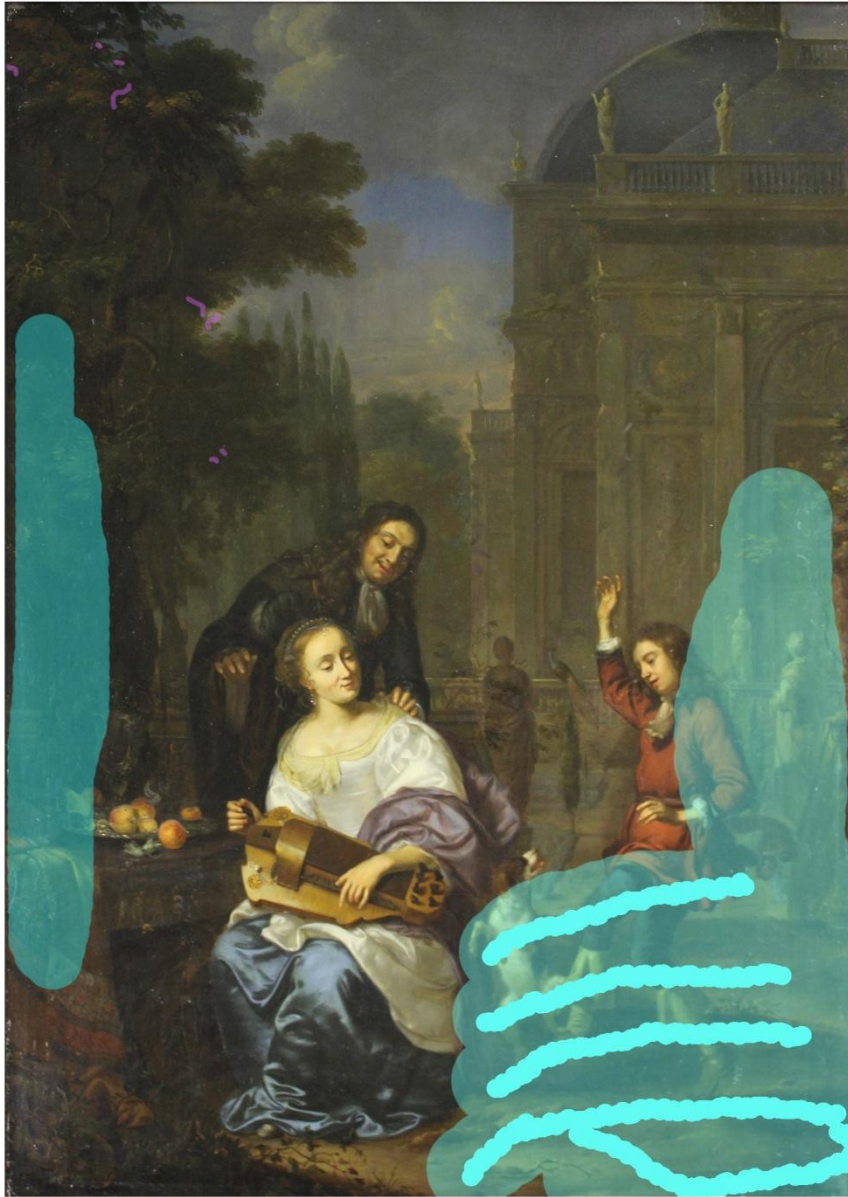


Figure 7: Water droplets and dust persistent throughout the painting's surface.



Figure 8

DIRT








WIPE MARKS RESIDUE



LINT STUCK IN VARNISH LAYER

DAMAGE



-  SCUFFED VARNISH
-  SCRATCHES PENETRATING PRIMARY SUPPORT
-  SCRATCHES IN VARNISH LAYER
-  POSSIBLE TAMPERING OR RESTORATION
-  BLIND CLEAVIDGE

Damages

The varnish layer of the painting seems to have been damaged and scuffed due to poor packing and storage. There are many uneven sections and scuff marks in the varnish: this is most apparent on the far left hand side of the painting where the panel meets the wood frame. This could possibly be due to dust and dirt accumulating between the frame and the panel. There are pieces of lint stuck in the varnish throughout the painting, but it is most apparent in the top left corner of the painting. Scratches in the varnish layer occur towards the bottom left and a long scratch is apparent over the woman's hand. I recommend the varnish layer be removed and reapplied by the conservator to correct these inconsistencies. Scuffs and scratches have been annotated in pink and green on the damage diagram.

In three instances, there are deep scratches on the painting surface, penetrating through the ground layer and into the panel. These deep scratches are most distracting upon viewing the painting and must be addressed before it can be exhibited again. These have been annotated in red on the diagram for damages.

Possible tampering or restoration of a paint loss is evident on the boy's eye, which has been annotated in blue on the diagram. See figure 9 for a more detailed image.

There are slight indentations in the wood panel throughout, but this seems to be a natural occurrence in the wood, as the paint and varnish appears to be in good order in these sections. The back of the panel has been bevelled on the edges: this has confirmed my suspicions that the piece has been restored. Unfortunately the frame has been attached to the panel in a very crude and invasive manner with large nails fixing the frame to the panel. Although this manner of attaching the panel to the frame is not ideal, I would not recommend intervention as the panel sits securely within the frame.



Bevelled Edges

Scratches and Gauges in
back of Panel

Crude nails attach frame to
panel



Figure 9: Losses on and around the eye of the boy dancing, with possible tampering or restoration on the eye itself.



Figure 10: Paint losses around the boy's foot with minor dust and scratches in the varnish layer.

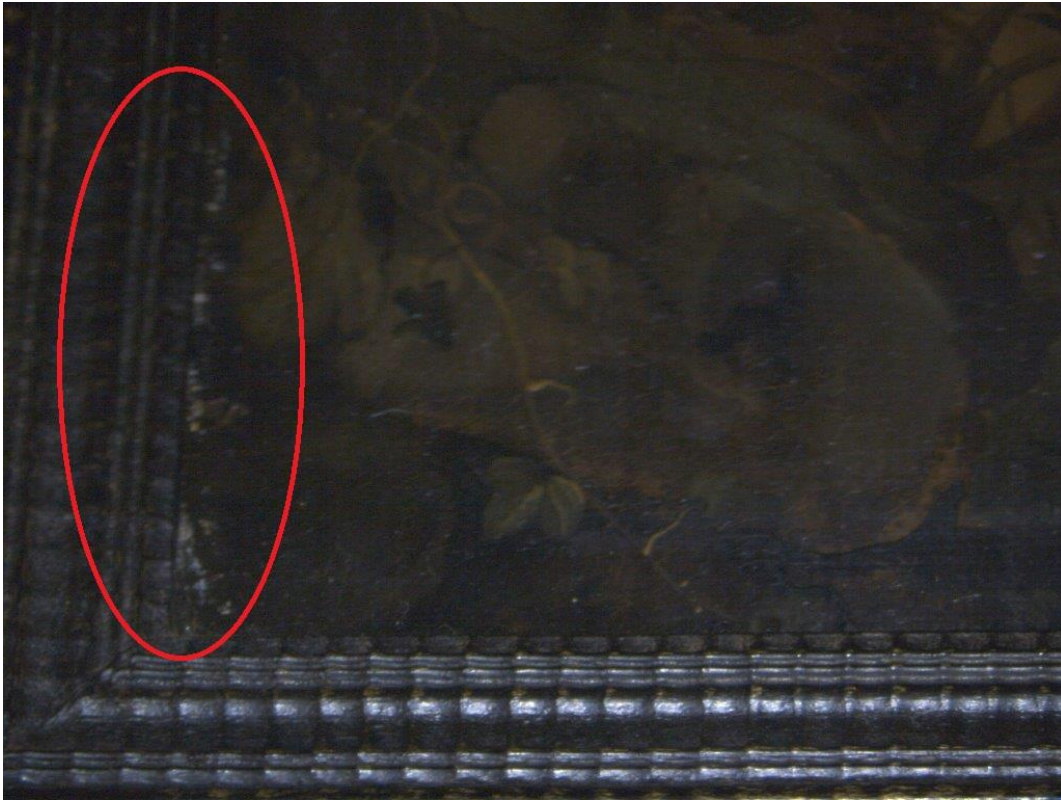


Figure 11: Paint losses between the frame and painting. This could have possibly occurred due to dust being caught in the space between the primary support and the frame.



Figure 12: A problematic gash penetrating through the ground layer and into the panel itself.

Conclusion:

My conclusion is that Lady *Playing and Dog Dancing* by Matheus Wijtman is a rare and unusual example of 17th Century Dutch painting. Funds should be made available for its restoration so it can be exhibited with the rest of the Abe Bailey collection. However, if restoration is not possible, the piece would benefit from a proper and thorough surface cleaning to dispose of the residue and water marks on the surface.

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