

The Restorer's Point of View



Fig. 19
Infrared reflectogram of fig. 1



Fig. 20
Detail from fig. 19



Fig. 21
Detail from fig. 1

The original canvas is of one piece. The painting was lined in 1956/57; the seam of this lining canvas was lightly impressed into the surface of the painting during the works. At the same time, a canvas strip of about 12.5 cm that was not original was removed.⁴⁷ Lines along the edges could be interpreted as frame abrasions stemming from a former, narrower stretcher frame. The varnish is more greyed than yellowed, and some areas are accordingly difficult to decipher. Local retouchings that have darkened suggest scuffing or older solvent damage underneath.

⁴⁷ Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery Archive, Restoration Index 1956 / no. 1609; Restoration Index 1946 / no. 1409.

The infrared reflectogram revealed that a surprising number of alterations occurred during the painting process – more than would be expected from a mere replica (fig. 19). This includes lines that can firmly be interpreted as underdrawings (fig. 20), which were applied swiftly with few strokes of the dry brush on the primer. However, the painted execution does not strictly adhere to this original underdrawing, part of which is even visible to the naked eye through the thin layer of paint (fig. 21): the arch of the mantelpiece on the right is one instance where the painted execution deviates particularly strongly from the underdrawing. The rather wide brushstroke is far below the version of the mantelpiece we see today. The edge of Jupiter's cloak also originally reached higher up.



Fig. 22
Detail from fig. 19



Fig. 23
Detail from fig. 1



Fig. 24
Paul Gleditsch, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*. London, British Museum



Fig. 25
Detail from fig. 1



Fig. 26
Detail from fig. 1



Fig. 27
Detail from fig. 19

In addition, the folds in Baucis's dress were only partly executed in accordance with the plan.

The spirited brushstrokes of the coloured rendering of the wall next to the fireplace (fig. 22), which were probably executed in azurite, reach underneath the layer of paint of the crockery shelf (fig. 23). Overlays of this kind would be unlikely if the position of the shelf had already been more clearly defined.

It is probable that the fruit basket was added after the figures had been executed. The right hand of Jupiter was clearly already in place when the basket was painted. In a subsequent step, the cushion (or the thigh) on which Mercury's arm is resting was given greater shading with a dark glaze; this was directed around the fruit.

In light of these differences between execution and sketch, we must ask whether this painting really was a simple workshop replica. Was there really a first version? These insights make it more likely that a member of the workshop created the Viennese painting following an oil sketch by Rubens.

Several details now seem to deviate from the original intention. Jupiter's upper arm and elbow resting on a cushion or the bench are now barely visible; they are perfectly apparent in the infrared. This pose therefore corresponds to the pose of Jupiter in the Paul Gleditsch engraving (fig. 24), an indication that this detail used to be more easily visible in the past.

In some areas, we see only the substratum of a coloured lake that has faded in several places, so that these areas now appear grey. This is particularly apparent on Mercury's underarm, which now looks light grey; presumably, it used to have a red sheen before the red lake pigment lost its colour (fig. 25).

In addition, the infrared reflectogram nicely shows retouchings of a later date that provide contours. Thus, for example, the beard of Jupiter, the hair of Philemon, and shaded areas of Baucis's face are underlined with dark brushstrokes. The face of Baucis, in particular, is now somewhat obscured by glazes from a later restoration (fig. 26); the infrared reflectogram clearly reveals the non-original revisions of the shaded areas (fig. 27).