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Pieter Holsteyn II
Study for a tulip, c. 1640s

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PIETER HOLSTEYN II
(Haarlem 1614 - 1673)

STUDY FOR A TULIP, c. 1640s

Gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper
33 x 21 cm.; 13 x 8 1/4 in.

Provenance

French private Collection.



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During the so-called *tulipomania*, the famous speculative bubble that took place in 17th-century Holland, ten tulip bulbs could cost more than a stately Amsterdam canal house.

Painted right after the height of the tulip speculation, this refined floral study belongs to the distinctive Dutch genre of single-specimen botanical studies produced for collectors' albums and specialist "tulip books". Such sheets, typically isolating a prized cultivar against an unarticulated ground, operate at the intersection of natural-history description and connoisseurly display. Comparable compilations - sometimes extensive and systematically inscribed with varietal names - circulated on the market, at times drawn specifically to advertise bulb auctions.

Since 1985, Sam Segal has recognised the distinct hand of Pieter Holsteyn the Younger (1614 - 1673) behind several albums and separate drawings, on the basis of their correspondence with signed work, including an album of watercolours of plants in the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society in London, and a sheet, dated 1637, from a tulip book.¹ Our drawing most likely belonged to a loose-leaf album of watercolours, which have been auctioned over the past few years.

Pieter Holsteyn II was trained in Haarlem within the family workshop and pursued a varied career across media (including engraving and stained-glass practice), yet the young Pieter acclaimed fame swiftly with his refined watercolour drawings of flowers and animals. A tradition which echoes the drawings by Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1600), Hans Bol (1534-1593) and Jacques de Gheyn II (1565-1629).² His corpus is characterised by a rigorous and controlled linework, crisp descriptive contour, and luminous bodycolour used to articulate surface and volume. The present sheet exemplifies these qualities. A single tulip rises on a taut, centrally aligned stem, the bloom and its petals carefully painted with the typical "broken" patterning - red striations over a pale ground - caused by a virus in the bulb, that made it especially valuable. Transparent wash modulates the inner cup and the cooler shadows at the base of the corolla. The leaves are rendered with restrained tonal shifts and subtle, darker veining.

¹ S. Segal, *Flowers and Nature*, The Hague 1990, p. 170.

² J. Schaeps, J. van der Veen et. al., *Leiden viert feest! Hoogtepunten uit een academische collectie*. Leiden 2014, pp. 100-101.

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A particularly close point of comparison is the Norton Simon Museum's sheet from a *Tulip Book* - catalogued as *A Tulip Book: Semper Augustus*, c. 1640s, in identical media and of comparable format (fig. 1). Additional museum comparanda for Holsteyn's tulip studies include examples in the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 2) and the Harvard Art Museums' *A Tulip with White and Red Stripes* (fig. 3). Other watercolours, close in size, handling and technique, are listed on the RKD archive (see for example nos. 210553, 210560, 210561, 210564, 210568, 210570, 210594, 210517).

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Fig. 1. Dutch 17th century (attr. to Pieter Holsteyn II?), *A Tulip Book: Semper Augustus*, c. 1640s, gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper. Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum.

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Fig. 2. Pieter Holsteyn II, *A Tulip with White and Red Stripes (Wit en root Boode)*, 17th century, transparent and opaque watercolour and grey ink over graphite on antique laid paper. Cambridge (MA), Harvard Art Museums (Fogg Art Museum).

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Fig. 3. Pieter Holsteyn II, *Study of a Tulip (Wit en root boode)*, c. 1645, point of brush and transparent and opaque watercolours with traces of graphite and gum glazing on antique laid paper. The Cleveland Museum of Art.

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