

SALOMON LILIAN

DUTCH OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

Cornelis Dusart

Haarlem 1660 –1704 Haarlem

Interior of an Inn with Peasants Merry-Making

Signed and dated lower left: Corn : dusart / 1692

Oil on copper

23.2 x 29.2 cm.

Provenance:

Burton-on-Trent, Bladon Castle, Mrs. Elizabeth Holbrooke (d. 1938)

Her estate sale, London, Christie, Manson and Woods, 17 February 1939, lot 63

Dieren, art trade D. Katz, 1946

Sale Amsterdam, Christie's, 28 November 1989, lot 27 (sold for Dfl.. 300.000)

Cornelis Dusart was born in Haarlem on April 24, 1660, the son of the organist at St. Bavo. He became one of the last apprentices to Adriaen van Ostade and, as Johan van Gool (1687-1763) observed, was the most promising of the master's pupils. On January 10, 1679, Dusart entered the Guild of St. Luke in Haarlem. Three years later, in 1682, he is recorded as an unmarried member of the Reformed Church in Haarlem. In 1692 he was appointed a *hoofdman* (leader) of the painter's guild. The artist died in 1704 and was buried in his native city. In July of that year, his art collection was auctioned in The Hague. It included a number of paintings by Adriaen van Ostade, and possibly some by Isack van Ostade, which were completed by Dusart. Apparently the artist had inherited the unfinished works at the time of his master Adriaen van Ostade's death in 1685. Dusart's paintings and drawings from 1679 to 1682 so closely resemble those of Adriaen van Ostade, that connoisseurs still have sometimes difficulty distinguishing their authorship. However, after 1682, Dusart developed a more distinct and personal style, inspired by the paintings of Jan Steen.

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The present painting, *Interior of an Inn with Peasants Merry-Making*, of 1692 illustrates this mature phase of Dusart's career. A drinking peasant, with legs splayed in a rather uncouth manner, clasps the hand of a comely young serving maid. Two male figures appear to watch her as they play upon the recorder and the violin. A young boy emerges from the cellar stairs, smiling as he looks upon the *roemer* in his hand, while a little girl gazes at the violinist. The arrangement of the figures around the table and the handling of space recall Jan Steen's interiors of peasants in a barn. Characteristic of Dusart's manner, however, are the somewhat caricatured expressions of the peasants, and the strong divisions of light and shade.

The instruments in the present painting probably have a double meaning; that of merry-making and that of seduction. In many Dutch seventeenth century paintings, the recorder or flute was often a veiled phallic symbol, while the violin or lute denoted the female sex. The recorder hanging on the wall next to the window in the present painting seems to underline this motif. The present work by Dusart seems to illustrate the Dutch saying, '*het fluitje en de veél*, which often appeared in stage plays and song texts of the time. The combination of these instruments in Dutch seventeenth century painting can carry sexual connotations, often denoting immoral behaviour.¹ In the present painting, the serving maid appears to be pulling the drinking man towards her (although it could equally be argued that he is pulling her towards him): in either case, he appears to be too drunk for action. Musical instruments in paintings were also regarded as metaphors of transience due to their quickly vanishing sound. In that sense, their presence in this painting could also point to the transient nature of the pleasures of the flesh.

Another painting of the same date by Cornelis Dusart, *Merry-Making*, in the National Gallery of Art, Dublin, is painted in a similar manner. Dated paintings by the artist have survived from nearly every year between 1679 and 1702.

WB

¹ T. Wind, *Jacob van Eyck and the Others. Dutch solo repertoire for recorder in the golden age*, Houten 2006, pp. 30-33.