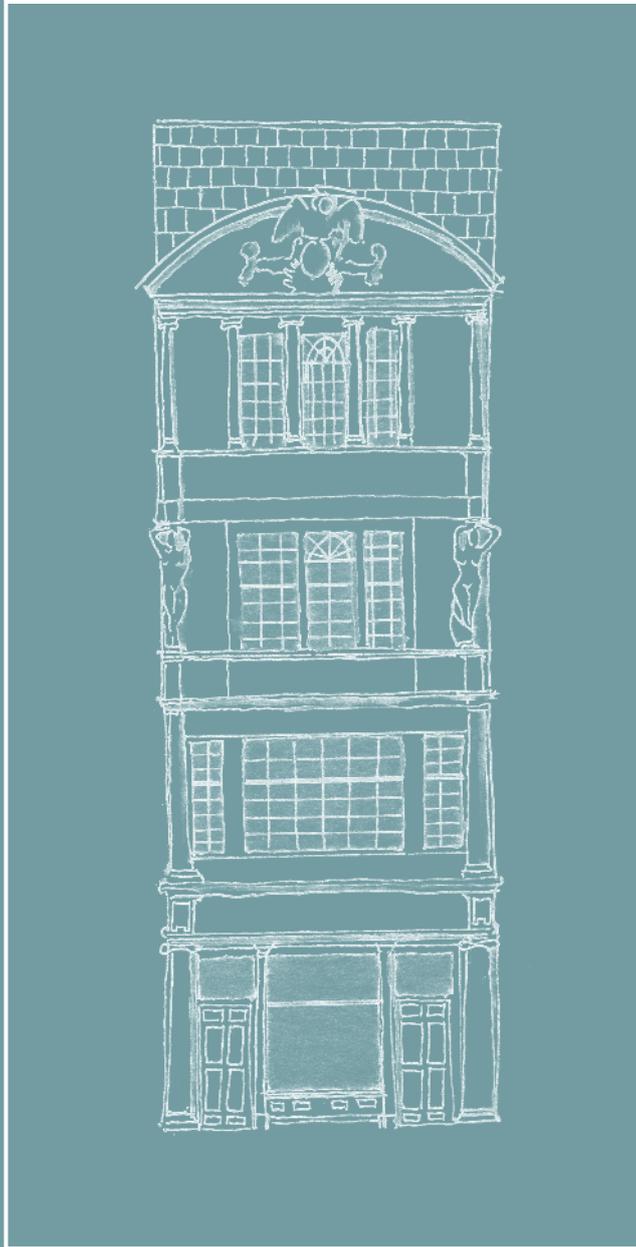


Gallery Notes



JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS

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Gallery Notes

is published to acquaint readers with the paintings and drawings offered for sale by

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FOREWORD

In March we exhibited at The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht for the twenty-first consecutive year, and as this remarkable event celebrated its own twenty-fifth birthday, we were encouraged to look back to the early years and draw comparisons with the present. As far as we are concerned, the only significant change is the conspicuous scarcity of fine quality Old Master paintings at the fair today which are new to the market, compared with what was on offer there two decades ago. Then one would arrive and expect to see seven or eight truly outstanding pictures that were hitherto unknown and which would become the talking points of the fair that year; at TEFAF nowadays, it is rare to have more than one painting of this stature. Rather than reflecting any lack of commitment on the part of the exhibitors, this is simply a reflection of today's market in Old Master paintings. It was sobering to look through the hundreds of pictures in the catalogues of the sales in New York at the beginning of the year and notice that nearly every single lot had been offered for sale at auction at some point in the last thirty or forty years. None of this comes as any surprise to me and my brother, however, since we were brought up in the belief that the best quality Old Master paintings were already rare, and that they were only going to get harder to find.

Our firm's long tradition of dealing in early seventeenth-century still life paintings has meant that we are better placed than most to observe both the dwindling supply and inverse rise in value of the best Old Masters. The delectable little flower painting on copper of 1612 by Roelandt Savery shown here (see illus.) was bought by us at Sotheby's in 2001 for nearly £1.8 million. The commonly-held belief that we had paid far too high a price for such a picture has just been dispelled; the owner sold it through a Swiss auction house six weeks ago for more than £3.6 m. In the light of this, one can't help wondering what the painting will be worth in another ten, twenty or thirty years' time.

Everything is relative, of course, and these sums are trifling when compared to the prices being paid for modern art – at the time of writing, the sale of Munch's pastel *Scream* is still very much in the headlines. The point has been made before, and bears repeating, that there is still a huge discrepancy in value between Old Masters and contemporary art; if a meaningless, repetitive Warhol screenprint can fetch millions of dollars, then on that basis a precious early flower painting from four centuries ago must be worth many times that. That this is not the case is greatly to the advantage of the true picture collector endowed with some understanding of the past and, above all, an appreciation of true craftsmanship. I have no hesitation in claiming both the exquisite Cornelis Bega painting of the girl drinking (pp. 4-5) and the Van den Broeck flowerpiece, still on the original, unlined canvas (p.7), to be worthy of any collection of Dutch Old Masters. Both have been hidden away for perhaps hundreds of years until now, and neither of them has required any more than careful cleaning to augment our appreciation of them. Sooner or later they will both find new homes, and then, to revert to my introductory theme, they will be for a while literally irreplaceable. In other words, it may not be possible to go out and find another masterpiece by Bega, especially as his career was cut short in its prime. Similarly, how many more unknown and undisturbed, fine Dutch flower paintings on their original canvases can there be hidden away in collections across the world? These paintings represent great opportunities and, for the time being, extraordinary value for money.



James Mitchell
June 2012

This richly detailed painting of the Nativity, dating from the 1520s, is an exciting discovery, and an important addition to the known work of Jacob Claesz. van Utrecht. We are very grateful to Dr. Didier Martens of the Université Libre de Bruxelles for identifying the authorship of the picture; Dr. Martens is to publish his discovery in a forthcoming issue of the Dutch art historical journal, *Oud Holland*.

Although it is ostensibly a painting of the Antwerp school bearing the influence of Joos van Cleve and the early Flemish school, this depiction of the Nativity was almost certainly created at Lübeck in northern Germany, one of the most important ports of the period. Born in Utrecht, Jacob Claesz. – or Jacob Traiectensis, as he called himself in recognition of the Roman name for his birthplace – trained in Antwerp and then, by 1519, had established himself as the leading artist in Lübeck, the founding city of the trading federation known as the Hanseatic League. He was also a member of the Leonhard Brotherhood, a fraternity of merchants in the city, which suggests that he was not only active as a painter but also as an art dealer. The known paintings by Jacob Claesz. van Utrecht consist of perhaps two dozen portraits of Lübeck notables and not more than fourteen religious scenes with the inclusion of patrons ('donor portraits'), to which latter body of work our example makes such a significant addition. One of his most important commissions in Lübeck was *Virgin and Child with Donors* (1520; Lübeck, St Annen-Kloster), a triptych for the councillor Hinrich Kerckring, portrayed with his wife on opposing wings. Even though the central panel differs from our painting in compositional terms, with most of the arched picture filled with the Virgin and the Christ Child sitting on her lap, the detailed, busy landscapes seen beyond and the distinctive *putti* holding up a cloth behind the Virgin readily bring to mind elements of the present painting.

If this *Virgin and Child with Donors* has remained in the St Annen-Kloster ever since it was commissioned five centuries ago, then it is even more remarkable that early this year the city of Lübeck was able to announce their purchase of the magnificent triptych by Jacob van Utrecht sold at Christie's in London last summer (see illustration), to hang in the St Annen-Kloster as well. Long hidden away in a private collection in Denmark since the mid-eighteenth century, the reappearance of this, the 'Gavnø Altarpiece' and one of his most important commissions, was, in hindsight, a remarkable coincidence, given that our example had hung unidentified in a Benedictine abbey school for at least a hundred and forty years and was offered for sale only two days later.

Even in his earliest works such as *Descent from the Cross* (1513; Berlin, Gemäldegalerie), Jacob Claesz. van Utrecht shows himself ready to adopt the cosmopolitan influence of schools beyond the southern Netherlands rather than merely following the great Antwerp masters, and the inclusion of populous, ancillary scenes alongside the principal subject suggests a precocious knowledge of Westphalian painting. Further premature leanings towards German art are suggested in his work for the abbey of Gross-St Martin in Cologne in about 1515, and by his knowledge of Albrecht Dürer's prints: in the central panel of the 'Gavnø Altarpiece' the Annunciation derives its composition from Dürer's woodcut of the subject for his *Small Passion* series. Jacob van Utrecht was clearly aware of the international currents in Renaissance art, and as a sophisticated and prominent resident, the wealthy merchants of Lübeck would have naturally been drawn to him. The face of the fur-wearing merchant in our *Nativity* speaks to us across five centuries as a wholly plausible one; here are a down-to-earth, sombre man of business and his more approachable-looking wife behind him, being portrayed as witnesses to the birth of

Jesus in the hope of the salvation of their souls. It hardly needs adding that this couple looking in on the Nativity would almost certainly have been acquainted in real life with the patrons depicted kneeling to witness the Annunciation in the 'Gavnø Altarpiece', and, indeed, it is hard to ignore the strikingly similar treatment given by the artist to the expressions and appearances of the two men.

The distinctive decorative cycles seen on the loggia-like barn beyond the central figure group in our *Nativity* (as in the 'Gavnø Altarpiece') reflect the artist's awareness of Italianate styles and may have added a further, exotic attraction in his work to prospective sitters. The Mannerist central column supporting the roof ends abruptly with the head of the female caryatid obscured from our view



Jacob Claesz. van Utrecht,
The 'Gavnø Altarpiece'. Christie's Images.



Jacob Claesz. van Utrecht (c.1480-after 1530)

The Nativity, with a Donor and his Wife
oil on oak panel, 25 x 18¾ in. (63.3 x 47.8 cm.)

by the roof, and this may be a reference to the end of Paganism implied by the birth of Christ. The angel is seen drying the baby Jesus's swaddling cloth in front of a fire, while some of the architectural features, notably the cornices in the upper-right corner, show faint traces of snow or ice, alluding to the traditional mid-winter of Christmas. Somewhat at odds with this, but in an original and pleasing manner, the artist depicts a summer landscape beyond to the left, with a wealth of detail in the pond with its swans, the farmhouses and, high up on the hill at the very top left, the faint suggestion of shepherds with their flocks.

There remains much to be written about this idiosyncratic painting, and we await Dr. Martens' study with keen anticipation. In spite of its eclectic influences it should be seen essentially as the work of a gifted and cultivated artist painting for a distinctive market on the Baltic, German, therefore, rather than Flemish.

J.F.M.

One of the most obvious but striking things about the 'Golden Age' of Dutch painting is the shortness of its history. The phenomenon lasted barely seventy years from about 1610 to 1680 but was amazingly rich in quantity and quality of achievement with many schools of painting forming independently from one another within one generation.

In terms of one life-span it is remarkable to note that Cornelis Pietersz. Bega was seven or eight years old when the leading Mannerist painter, Cornelis van Haarlem, died in 1638. Van Haarlem was also Bega's grandfather on his mother's side. The son of a goldsmith, little is known about Bega's early life but in 1654 he joined the painter's guild in Haarlem, establishing himself in Arnold Houbraken's words as Adriaen van Ostade's 'eerste en beste leering [first and best pupil]'. The heir to Adriaen Brouwer, Van Ostade was the unrivalled exponent of the Haarlem School 'low life' subject matter. His groups of peasants, and often whores, in poorly lit taverns and interiors were records, however crude, of everyday life.

Painted in 1663 or 1664, our recently discovered *Young Woman with a Jug and a Wine Glass* endorses Houbraken's view but also establishes, in all its beauty, how far Bega outstripped his rivals. Just how far we will never know; within a decade of joining the guild Bega's life and vocation were laid to rest in St. Bavo's cathedral. His finest work came from his last few years (see his *Astrologer*, 1663 National Gallery, London, *Alchemist*, 1663 The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and *Sleeping Maid* (see illus. below) so the plague caught Bega in full flourish. Indeed of the nine recorded paintings dated 1663, no fewer than six are now in museums.

This year, however, Cornelis Bega's distinction and acclaim has been greatly enhanced in the form of a wonderful exhibition *Eleganz und Raue Sitten (Elegance and Boorish Manners) – Cornelis Bega* (for dates and venues see www.cornelis-bega.de). This is the first ever exhibition devoted to Bega and the director of the Aachen City Museums, Peter van den Brink, and a team of scholars have successfully tracked down as many paintings and, crucially, rarely seen drawings, from both major and smaller museums as well as private collections worldwide. An impressive and scholarly catalogue accompanies the exhibition which serves as further revelation about Bega's talents as a painter but also as a highly skilled draughtsman. Like the men and women depicted in his paintings, many of the works emerge in unison from the somewhat shadowy legacy of an all too short career.

The unusual exhibition title aptly holds the key to fully appreciating Cornelis Bega; the juxtaposition of an outstanding colourist with the anonymity of the 'low life' Dutch interiors or perhaps the contrast of the light of his talent with the restrictive dark of the genre. Rather than outgrowing the van Ostade legacy, Bega's style and palette developed in his last few years into something more monumental. The picture formats became mostly vertical as the number of figures dwindled in his compositions. The bolder treatment of the figures and exquisite handling of draperies drew away from the unchangingly sparse and monochrome gloom of the tavern or house interior backdrops. In these penultimate paintings the blurred iconography of the settings recedes in priority and Bega's sitters, conjured in a palette of steely blues, greys and salmon pink passages, come to the fore (see fig. 1)

Young Woman with a Jug and a Wine Glass seems to distil all Bega's gifts onto a small and wonderfully preserved canvas. The bloom of colour invokes the viewer's curiosity already roused by the lure of the raised glass, revealingly clasped by a distinctly unladylike and 'raue' (raw) hand. The young woman appears in the beautiful *Duet* (Stockholm Museum), in *Grace Before the Meal* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) and in fig.1. All these pictures are dated 1663 so it is quite likely that she was Bega's most treasured model, if not more! The contrast



A Parlour Maid at Rest, 1663.
Sold by John Mitchell
& Son, 2001.

between her gold-green skirt, the ultramarine hair bands (a Dutch *snood*) and the fur-lined jacket, the same one as in seen *Sleeping Maid*, gave the 'virtuoso' Bega an opportunity to show off. Even household servants were frequently criticized for overdressing at the time and this is far from everyday costume. In our painting the open jacket betrays her as a courtesan bringing together the not unfamiliar association of alcohol and eroticism but like in the other refined pictures Bega goes no further with moralizing and allusions; the ingenious colour scheme and the luster given to the satin, the jug and glass and the still life, for example, take precedence. In stylistic and thematic terms the boorish caricatures of his earliest paintings seem to have disappeared long ago, even if it happened in less than a decade.

With *Young Woman with a Jug and a Wine Glass*, as much as anything, Bega invites the onlooker in to his world. Yet again we encounter the proverbial 'snapshot' of life in seventeenth-century Holland that continues to fascinate today's collectors and scholars nearly four centuries later.

W.J.M.



Cornelis Bega (1631/32 – 1664)

Young Woman with a Jug and a Wine Glass

oil on canvas, 10½ x 8¾ in. (27 x 22 cm.)

signed with initials lower left. Painted in 1663 or 1664.

Provenance: Marquis de Colbert, Chateau de Sausay; by inheritance to the Bourbon Busset family, Chateau de Saussay; Sotheby's Paris, 23rd June 2011, lot 46.

Exhibited: Aachen, Germany, Suermondt Ludwig Museum, now until 10th June; Berlin, Gemäldegalerie/Staatliche Museum from 29th June to 30th September 2012.



Joris van der Haagen (c.1615-1669)

An extensive coastal landscape with a traveller resting on a path
oil on canvas, 28¼ x 36½ in. (72.1 x 92.7cm.),
indistinctly signed lower right.

Provenance: Private collection, South Africa.

The panoramic view was a particularly Dutch form of landscape painting. Level fields and hamlets stretch out to low horizons with most of the picture given over to vast skies. Throughout the seventeenth century the concept of the sweeping panorama, whether topographically real or imaginary, underwent stylistic changes. Often painters would incorporate pictorial props, tree stumps and stands of trees in the foreground, on one or both sides of the composition. They acted as 'stage wings' with the clouds following the sweep of the trees as seen in the present painting.

A painter of woodlands, townscapes and panoramas, van der Haagen most likely studied with his father, Abraham, before moving to the Hague in 1639 where he joined the Guild of St. Luke in 1643. His delicate drawings form an important part of his artistic output and are proof of extensive painting trips in the southern Netherlands, Rhineland and France. Views and recurring motifs from the landscapes of Kleve, Arnhem and Maastricht in particular feature in many of his paintings. *View of the Swanenturm, Kleve* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv.c.138) is one of his best known pictures. A tall, willowy oak tree frames the right half of the view as a river meanders back to a hilltop castle in the far left. With its low-lying hills receding all the way to an estuary and tall ships, our rather poetic painting, complete with maypole dancers in the middle ground, is certainly an imaginary view but seems to borrow the far off headland from one of his numerous views of Arnhem and Rijnpoort (the best example being the picture in the Historisch Museum, Arnhem). Van der Haagen did not paint his own staffage, and the figure of the traveller resting under the trees was most likely added at a later stage.

W.J.M.



Elias van den Broeck (1650-1708)

A Rose, Poppy, Hibiscus and other Flowers in a Vase with Snails
oil on unlined canvas, 17½ x 13½ in. (44.5 x 34.5 cm.), signed.

Van den Broeck painted flowers, fruit and woodland still lifes. He was born in Amsterdam where he served his apprenticeship with the flower painter, Cornelis Kick, which lasted four years until 1669 when he trained under Jan Davidsz. de Heem in Utrecht. Van den Broeck may have followed de Heem to Antwerp as he was registered in the guild there by 1673. Today around forty signed paintings are known by him, yet he rarely dated his works. Although there were many accomplished and perhaps better known flower painters working at the time, in particular Willem van Aelst whose diagonal compositions inspired van den Broeck (see his *A Vase of Flowers*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford A540), van den Broeck went far beyond being a decent de Heem imitator. Van den Broeck's reddish palette and a liking for large, papery poppy heads gave an even stronger contrast to the deep shadows he created in his bouquets. The discovery of this unknown canvas, now cleaned for the first time since it was painted, demonstrates that a good painting can always teach us something new; here was a craftsman at his best. What gives these 'Golden Age' flower paintings their enduring appeal is this enchanting artistry that spares no detail, especially the whimsical snails and a third, tiny one poking out of the hibiscus.

W.J.M.



Thomas Jones (1742-1803)

A View over an Estuary at low tide
oil on canvas, 14¾ x 21¼ in (37.5 x 54 cm.)

Thomas Jones is now widely thought of as the first British *plein-air* artist, and his scarce oil studies of rooftops in Naples are among the most widely recognised images from the golden age of art in Britain. Only sixty years ago, however, Jones remained virtually unknown. In 1949 Professor Anthony Blunt of the Courtauld Institute of Art discouraged a student from writing a study of the artist on the grounds that he was 'too obscure, his works (tucked away in remote Welsh houses) unworthy of the research necessary for a PhD thesis.' It was only with the publication at about the same time of his autobiographical manuscript, or *Memoirs* (see Bibliography), that there was a revival of interest in the life and work of Thomas Jones. As a primary source of information about Jones's master, Richard Wilson, and his studio the *Memoirs* proved invaluable, establishing Jones himself as a copyist of Wilson, but not much else. In 1954 fifty oils and watercolours by Jones of views in Wales and Italy appeared in a Christie's auction, and at last he began to be recognised for the gifted and original artist that he was. His rehabilitation was completed by a major exhibition of his work in 2003.

Even when this serene coastal vista was sold by our firm in the late 1960s, his work was still not thoroughly understood, and this view was thought to have been taken on the Welsh coast. The handling and style suggest that it is in fact a work dating from his seven-year stay in Italy, or from the years after his return, as the painting is markedly different from his early Welsh views. The structure of the composition adheres to a formula with which Jones succeeded in some of his grandest views of the Bay of Naples (see nos. 106 & 107 in the 2003 catalogue – see [Bibl.](#)): a dark tree framing most of one – or both – sides of the picture, a dark foreground with lighter elements in the immediate front, a majestic, sweeping seascape up to the height of the middle horizon, and a luminous, warm sky filling the remainder of the picture. The same is largely true of his highly finished classical landscape, *Lake Nemi* (no.58 in 2003 catalogue), which owes as much of a debt to Richard Wilson as does Joseph Wright of Derby's *Lake Nemi* (Cardiff, National Museum of Wales), formerly attributed to Wilson himself.

Newly cleaned, our canvas is a fine example of the work of a British artist who was changed by a long and fecund stay in Naples and Rome in a fascinating period in the history of art.

J.F.M.

Bibliography: A.P.Oppé (ed.), *Memoirs of Thomas Jones*, The Walpole Society 1946-1948, Vol. XXXII; W.G.Constable, Richard Wilson, London 1953;
A.Sumner & G.Smith (eds.), *Thomas Jones (1742-1803) – An artist rediscovered*, Yale University Press, 2003.

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Each issue of *Gallery Notes* is carefully researched for accuracy of comment and the reproductions are as faithful as possible. However, often there is considerably more material on an artist than can be included here and colour transparencies may be a better guide to the original, so please do not hesitate to let us know if we can be of help in this respect. We would also ask for your help in avoiding wastage. If you do not care to remain on our mailing list or if you change your address or wish *Gallery Notes* to be sent to an address other than the present one, please advise us. May we, in return, offer our guidance on the acquisition, sale, conservation and framing of paintings, and on their valuation for probate, insurance, C.G.T. or other purposes. An independent view of buying and selling at auction has always been advisable.

Our policy remains unchanged. Across all schools, periods, and values, we seek, with rigorous selectivity, a high standard of quality in what we buy. Once satisfied, we feel able to offer works with confidence, backed up by long experience, integrity and scholarship. The business is one of long-term friendship, not short-term advantage.

We hope that in receiving *Gallery Notes* you will share the interest and enjoyment which they have brought to collectors throughout the world for over fifty years.

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(back cover image)

Dutch School, early 18th century

Study of an Emperor Moth (saturnia pavonia)

watercolour on vellum

117 x 142 mm



Photography by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd



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