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OF THE CITY OF DETROIT**

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BLIND MAN'S BUFF BY CLAUDE LORRAIN, FRENCH, 1600-1682,
AND PIETER VAN LAER, DUTCH, 1582-1642.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Reichbold, 1942

AN EARLY WORK BY CLAUDE LORRAIN

THANKS to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Reichhold, the museum has acquired a fascinating "Blind Man's Buff" (frontispiece) which can be said with great probability to be the combined work of Claude Lorrain and the excellent Dutch genre painter, Pieter van Laer. It is well known that Claude Lorrain employed other artists to paint the figures in his landscapes. Although he studied figure drawing as well as landscape he never became a good figure painter and, being self-critical enough to be aware of his weakness he used the help of other painters who had a special gift for painting figures in small size.

Only last year we had the good fortune to add another work by this greatest of the early classicists in landscape painting which proved to be the earliest known dated painting by Claude Lorrain, bearing his signature and the date 1631. It shows already his mature style, and, indeed, Claude was at the time thirty-one years of age, having worked for more than a decade in Rome. The newly acquired painting carries us a step further towards solving the problem of his early development, to which in recent years his biographers have devoted considerable study. This picture can be dated at least four years earlier than the *Evening* of 1631 and gives us for the first time an idea how his early works must have looked.

We are well informed of the history of Claude's early life. We know that he was born at Champagne in Lorraine in 1600, came to Italy about 1613 and was soon employed by Agostino Tassi, an artist who specialized in decorative wall painting. He is mentioned in a document as Tassi's assistant in 1613 in doing some frescoes at Bagnaia. We learn from another source that he probably worked two years with another decorative painter in Naples, that he went back to Rome and returned to Lorraine in 1625 for two years. From 1627 on he was in Rome again, where he stayed the rest of his life until 1682. In the workshop of Tassi, in his independent work before 1625, and even after his return to Rome in 1627 Claude painted decorations in Roman palaces, doing imaginative landscape compositions of which none seems to have survived. As Tassi was a pupil of Paul Bril, the famous Flemish painter who was one of the first to paint decorative landscape frescoes in Rome, Claude's historians are generally of the opinion that, if early pictures by him should be found, they would probably show the influence of Bril's rather conventional and theatrical style. Our painting, with its trees of simplified forms arranged somewhat like stage scenery, in cool, bluish-green tints reminding one of the fresco colors of Bril, conforms with this suggestion. However, this is not the only reason why we believe it to be by Claude Lorrain.

Our painting, whose superior qualities no one has ever questioned, has been a puzzle to art critics for some time. In fact, it was one of the anonymous paintings exhibited recently in a New York exhibition called "Paintings in search of an author." It was then attributed tentatively to the Spanish school, but when acquired by the museum it was called "unknown Italian school of the seventeenth century." If we now claim it to be the combined work of a French and a Dutch artist, those who are suspicious of the value of "attributions" may feel occasion for scepticism.

It should be remembered, however, that there are periods in art history when artists of different countries were in such close contact that it is not easy to recognize their normally obvious national characteristics. Our painting originated at such a period. It can be proved that it was painted at Rome about 1625-30. It was

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therefore produced in an artistic milieu composed of artists from all countries working in close connection one with another in the development of a new classic conception in landscape art. The German painter Elsheimer, the Flemish Paul Bril, the Dutch genre and landscape artists Breenberg and Poelenburg were the first prominent foreigners active in Rome at this transition period. They were followed by a great number of artists among whom the best known are Leonard Braemer, Pieter van Laer, Joachim Sandrart, Claude Lorrain, Gasper Dughet, Nicholas Poussin and, last but not least, Velasquez, who made his first journey to Rome in 1630 when he painted the two enchanting "plein-air" views in the garden of the Villa d'Este.

If our painting was thought to be Spanish, it was obviously for the extraneous reason of the costumes of the party playing blind man's buff in the foreground, especially of the two spectator couples. The ladies with wide skirts, the men with tied stockings, bows on their shoes and short black mantles, are known to everyone from the portraits of the Spanish court painted by Velasquez and his school. But these costumes were also worn in Italy, especially in the South where the Spanish influence was strong. In fact, we find them with slight variations all over Western Europe among the aristocracy of this period, as we learn from Callot's etchings "La Noblesse"; the date of the latter series (1622-25) helps us in determining the date of our painting.

The proof that our picture was executed in or near Rome lies in the canvas and the subject. The peculiarly-woven rough canvas, showing small raised squares between the threads can be found, although not too frequently, in Roman paintings of this period; Ribera and Salvator Rosa used it, for instance, and occasionally



ENGRAVING BY RICHARD
EARLOM, AFTER AN ORIGINAL
DRAWING BY CLAUDE LORRAIN
IN THE COLLECTION
OF LORD SPENCER.

other artists active in Rome. Thus we find it in our Poussin *Selene and Endymion* which was painted in Rome in the middle thirties of the seventeenth century.

The character of trees—oaks, olives and cypresses—and the parkway decorated with classical statues point to a place near one of the many villas in or near Rome, where Claude Lorrain was fond of making his studies. But could the landscape have been painted by an Italian or a Dutch artist? Style, color and technique speak against it. The Italians from Agostino Caracci to Salvator Rosa give to their landscapes a more monumental and heroic character. They do not individualize the types of trees or represent so realistically the play of light and shadow; besides, they lack the intimacy of feeling so pronounced in our composition, which gives the park view almost the character of an interior, and speaks for a northern artist. On the other hand, the Dutch landscape painters who received their inspiration in Italy, like Both, Hackaert and Moucheron, are more minute in touch and do not outline the trees in such broad masses, while on the other hand they developed their compositions in warm golden tones quite different from the cool fresco-like color of our picture.

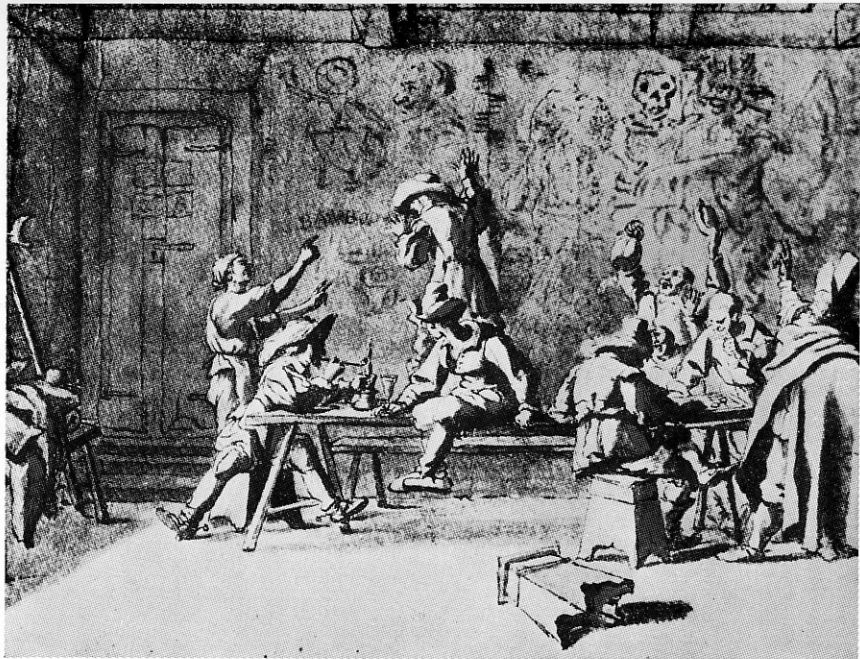
From such considerations also, it seems likely that a French landscape painter of classical tendency should be the creator of our picture. That it could only be Claude is proved by a careful comparison especially with his early drawings. The rhythmic division of sunlight and shadow, the fine atmospheric gradations towards the depth, the pleasure taken in twisted trees and old oaks covered with ivy, and lastly, some passages of leaf forms which (as Hind says of his early drawings) reminds us more of cauliflower than of leaves—all these characteristics can be found in many of his works. It is true, the composition is unusual among the paintings of Claude. But if we look through the *Liber Veritatis* we find a drawing which gives a similar motive and it is obviously a study of our picture. It differs from the painted composition no more than many other drawings in the *Liber Veritatis* from the well known paintings for which they were studies. Unfortunately, we cannot reproduce a photograph of the original drawing in Lord Spencer's collection, but give the eighteenth century engraving after the drawing by Richard Earlom.

The drawing is without figures which suggest that in the painting the figures are not by Claude's hand. A careful study of the technique makes this certain. The artist of the "staffage" added even the statue upon its broad base at the turn of the road which is included in the drawing.

The figures, however, are introduced with so much skill that at a first glance no one would suspect another hand. In proportion they fit perfectly into the space and their vivid colors enhance the composition considerably. The lively red dress of the lady in the foreground forms an excellent contrast to the bluish tones of the trees, and the strong blue and green dress and red shoes of the pretty girl who tries to escape from the blindfolded woman, are in themselves a delightful harmony.

There can be hardly any doubt, as Mr. Richardson first discovered, that the painter of the figures is Pieter van Laer, that strange Dutch painter who was called "*Bamboccio*" and who created a special type of genre painting in Italy, named after him *bambocciate*. Instead of reproducing for comparison some of his well known genre paintings which always show a similar Carravaggiesque contrast of light and shadows, similar rich color and easy and natural movement of figures, we reproduce one of his characteristic drawings representing the Dutch painters guild in Rome. The extravagant zigzag movement of its baroque composition of figures can well be compared with that of the figures in Claude's parkview.

We know that Claude and Pieter van Laer were well acquainted. Sandrart speaks of an excursion he made with both of them to Tivoli. They lived after 1628 a few



THE DUTCH PAINTERS GUILD IN ROME,
DRAWING BY PIETER VAN LAER, BERLIN PRINT ROOM.

houses from one another in the same street. Although the early documents do not mention that van Laer painted "staffage" in Claude's landscapes later catalogue descriptions have often mentioned their names together—too frequently in fact, since the figures in Claude's landscapes in the style of van Laer are usually by his follower, Jan Miel, who never reached the level of van Laer's art. In few of Claude's paintings do the figures play so successful a part as here; so that we do not know to whom more praise should be given in this happily combined creation—to the Frenchman or the Dutchman.

Pieter van Laer lived, according to Sandrart, sixteen years in Rome. As we know that he left the town in 1639, his arrival should fall in the year 1623. His last biographer, however, tries to show that this did not take place until 1625 or early 1626. If this is correct, it is more likely that Claude collaborated with him upon the present picture in 1627 or 1628, after Claude had returned to Rome from his journey of 1625-26 to Lorraine. The probability is in any case that the collaboration took place either in 1625 or 1627.

W. R. VALENTINER

¹Accession Number 42.11. Canvas; Height: 31 inches; Width: 33½ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Reichhold, 1942.

Literature: Of the considerable literature on Claude Lorraine and Pieter van Laer we mention in connection with the present problem only: Walter Friedlaender, *Claude Lorraine*, Berlin, 1921; Arthur B. Hind, *The Drawings of Claude Lorraine*, London, 1925; E. W. Moes, "Pieter van Laer", *Oud Holland*, XII, 1894; G. J. Hoogewerff, "Pieter van Laer en zyn vrienden," *Oud Hollend* XLIX and L, 1932 and 1933; G. Hess, *Agostino Tassi*, 1935.

THE TOMB OF WILLIAM THE SILENT, BY EMANUEL DE WITTE

THE FOUNDER of the independence of the Netherlands, William the Silent, was assassinated in his home at Delft in 1584. His death occurred in the midst of a forty year war for liberty. But in 1609, when the twelve year truce with Spain came as a tacit admission of Dutch independence, the States General commissioned the most famous architect and sculptor of the country to create a tomb in the new baroque taste worthy of the "great benefits and famous deeds of this illustrious prince." "Sparing no expense thereon," says the seventeenth century historian Pieter Bor, "having to make it the excellent, famous Artist, Architect and Sculptor Master Hendrik de Keyser, renowned through all Europe, from four materials, to wit, of white Italian Marble, of Dinant Touchstone, also of black Italian mottled Marble, and lastly of Bronze Metal. Which was made so elegantly, that in all Christendom few things might be found like to it in elegance, costliness and art: for besides the first eight-and-twenty thousand gulden, and beyond a further grace of a thousand gulden paid, the work was nonetheless so much added to and improved that it came still to a cost of several thousand gulden over; and 'tis not to be wondered at, considering the elegance and excellent art of the same work. And having been under construction nearly six years, is still to this day the twelfth of November of the year 1620 not wholly and completely executed; and is to be seen at Delft in the Nieuwe Kerk within the choir."¹

The memorial in which William of Orange "father of the fatherland" (in the words of the inscription) lies surrounded by the symbolical figures of *Justice, Liberty, Religion and Valor*, became the pride of Delft and a monument of Dutch patriotism; the vault beneath it has been the burial place of nearly all the princes of the House of Orange down to the present day. When thirty years later there arose in Delft a school of painting, one of whose achievements was to raise the painting of architecture to the highest level it ever retained, it was natural that the tomb should find its way into the pictures of Delft artists. One of these, showing the *Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk at Delft, with the Tomb of William the Silent*, by Emanuel de Witte (1617-1692), came recently into the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts as the gift of Dr. C. J. K. van Aalst, of Hoevelaken, The Netherlands.² It represents one of the most impressive views to be found in a Gothic fabric, the view from the ambulatory through the columns of the choir, down the perspective of the nave. When the Gothic churches of Holland were rearranged for the Dutch Protestant usage, the focus of the service was changed from the altar at the head of the choir to the pulpit halfway down the length of the nave, leaving the chancel vacant and unusual. The tomb of William the Silent thus occupies the spot where the altar stood in the original design of the church; while the religious usage now faces across the nave in the center.

These two aspects of the church were painted by the young de Witte in a pair of pictures that seem to be among his earliest essays in this new subject matter. He had begun in the 1640's by painting figures and mythological subjects in the dark warm chiaroscuro manner of Rembrandt. About 1650 he turned to architecture under the inspiration of an older painter in Delft named Gerard Houckgeest. In the Wallace Collection, London, is his earliest signed and dated architectural painting (1651) which represents the interior of the Oude Kerk at Delft, looking toward the pulpit during the sermon, with the congregation gathered about the preacher. It is also a panel with an arched top (an influence from Houckgeest) like ours, and since it is almost identical in measurements and form, and since the

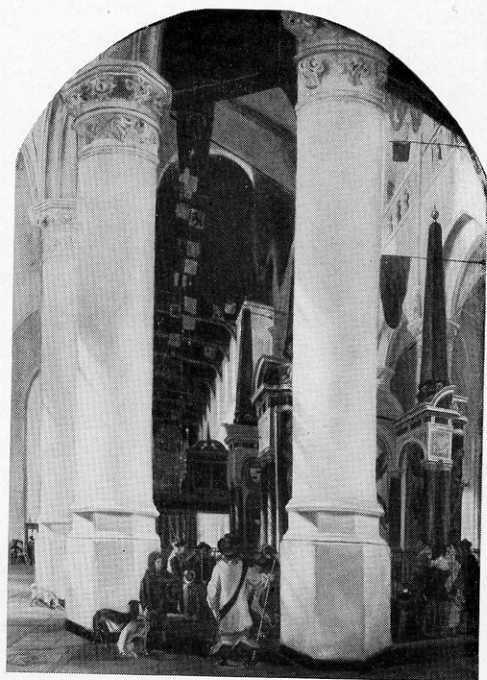
two together represent the two principal aspects of the two great Gothic churches of Delft, it is probable that they were painted as companion pictures and that ours was also done in 1651. As I have written of de Witte in *The Art Quarterly* and of the development of Dutch architectural painting in the *Bulletin*, it is enough to add here that our new picture is an important document in the rise of the Delft school.³

It is characteristic of de Witte and of the Dutch artistic imagination, that our picture is an imaginative and pictorial, rather than a factual approach to the subject. If one wants to know exactly how the tomb looked in every detail, one must go to an engraving. The artist painted a more complex and imaginative image, in which is distilled the experience, as it remains in the memory, of being in that stately and noble place with the crowd, the pomp of the baroque tomb, the pageantry of flags, the poetry of the evening light within the church all playing their part. Some of the warmth of the artist's youthful palette still lingers: the cool whites and greys of the architecture are tempered by warm browns and red in the figures, by the red, brown and yellow battle flags hanging from the piers and by the brown wooden roof. Nonetheless it is one of the earliest clear statements of the architectonic beauty of space and light, and of the cool, light palette, for which Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch and de Witte were to make Delft famous.

E. P. RICHARDSON

¹Quoted in Reiner Boitet, *Beschryving der Stadt Delft*. Delft, 1729, p. 296.

²Accession Number: 37.152. Arched panel; Height: 27 inches; Width: 19 inches. Collections: Strasbourg (seal on the back); Weber, Hamburg; C. J. K. van Aalst, Hoevelaken, Netherlands. Wurzbach and Jantzen describe the picture a generation ago as being



INTERIOR OF THE
NIEUWE KERK, DELFT,
WITH THE TOMB OF
WILLIAM THE SILENT
BY EMANUEL DE WITTE,
DUTCH, 1617-1692.

Gift of Dr. C. J. K. Van Aalst, 1937.

somewhat overpainted on the right side and having a false signature. It is now cleaned and in admirable condition.

³*The Art Quarterly*, I (1938), p. 4-17; *Bulletin*, XVI (1936-37), p. 105-113. Jantzen's theory of the origin of the Delft School, *Das Niederländische Architekturbild*, 1910, p. 117, is built up in part around our picture. His theory, though ingenious, seems to me over elaborate. The intricate mutual relations of de Witte and Houckgeest he postulates, are possible; but if the Delft painters had seen certain of Saenredam's pictures, executed as early as the 1630's, this influence would explain the same phenomenon much more simply.

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THE LIGHTHOUSE BY MARSDEN HARTLEY, AMERICAN, CONTEMPORARY

Lent by The Macbeth Gallery to The Twenty-Seventh Annual Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists at The Institute, April 9 to May 10. The exhibition is composed of paintings by Arnold Blanch, Alexander Brook, Charles Burchfield, John Carroll, Clarence Carter, Stuart Davis, Emil Ganso, William Gropper, Marsden Hartley, Karl Knaths, Carlos Lopez, Sarkis Sarkisian, Zoltan Sepesby and Franklin Watkins.