

New information on previously unpublished 17th-century Dutch paintings in the Hermitage

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The catalogues of Dutch paintings in the Hermitage published up to now (1958, 1981) in no way reflect the full scale of the collection. Historical circumstances, including the reorganization of the museum in the Soviet period, resulted in some paintings being largely inaccessible for study purposes. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to several works that have either been published with erroneous attributions or, indeed, never been published at all.

The *Head of a young woman* (inv. nr. GE 1978; oil on panel, 40 x 37 cm., with additions 57 x 46 cm.) entered the museum at the end of the 18th century as a *Portrait of a woman* by Govert Flinck, and was later erroneously ascribed to Ferdinand Bol. On stylistic grounds the work can be given with some confidence to Jan van Noordt (1623/24-after 1676). Soft yet energetic modeling, winding contours indicating passages such as the neck and ear and the virtuoso placement of highlights (the filigree-like spiraling shapes marking the edge of the white shirt – a typical feature in van Noordt's works) all support this attribution. The format of this bust-length likeness, its naturalism and the powerful light and shade would seem to indicate that it is not a portrait or a study from life, but rather a *tronie*. The young woman's rich dress immediately recalls the costumes worn by historical figures. Yet her hairstyle – the hair gathered at the back of the neck affixed with a small white basketwork clip – and modest earring tell another story. The maidservants or nude models in works from the Circle of Rembrandt wear such accessories. This ambiguity is evidence that the artist used fantasy attire to introduce an intriguing and exotic note to an image painted from life. David de Witt supports the proposed attribution (letter to the author, 28 November 2008).

I would like to link another enigmatic painting in the Hermitage (inv. nr. GE 8193; oil on panel, 49 x 37.5 cm.) with the name of Jan van Noordt. In this case it is of a girl's head in profile with flowing copper hair. The chiaroscuro effect - the brightly lit mass of hair contrasted with the dark area around it - is a familiar device that was adapted and developed in Rembrandt's Circle. Hermitage catalogues first gave the painting to Jan Lievens and later to Christoph Paudiss, but neither of these attributions finds support in its stylistic hallmarks. The facial features (high forehead, extremely indented bridge of the nose, small chin) are very close to those of Jan van Noordt's sitters. Similar features are seen in the modest bride with lowered gaze in *The Magnanimity of Scipio* (dated 1672; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) and in a work attributed (with question) to the artist, *Head of a young woman* (Lier, Museum Wuyts-van Campen), although in both cases the subjects are much older. Also characteristic of Jan van Noordt are the extremely soft flesh tones and the combination of semi-transparent and impasto paint. In my opinion, although the *Head of a young woman* cannot with sufficient certitude ascribe to Jan van Noordt, a tentative attribution to the circle of this master seems appropriate.

In addition to works by leading masters, the Hermitage has a fine collection of more modest paintings, which tend to be overshadowed by the celebrated masterpieces. However, these can often contribute significantly to our knowledge of the more renowned works. In the Hermitage

reserve collection is a *Portrait of Wolrad von Plessen* (inv. nr. GE 8481; oil on canvas), reproducing a detail from Jan Lievens' celebrated *Prince Charles Louis taught by Wolrad von Plessen as Aristotle and the young Alexander* (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum). This run-of-the-mill copy probably does not derive from the original, but is instead a version of the same composition that was in the Imperial Hermitage as of the mid-18th century (oil on canvas, 105 x 88 cm.). That painting was described as follows under number 1885 in the 1774 printed catalogue of the Hermitage Gallery: "Govaert Flinck. Le prince d'Orange et Guillaume Caats." In his 1932 monograph (H. Schneider, R.E.O. Ekkart, *Jan Lievens. Sein Leben und seine Werke*, Amsterdam 1973, p. 125), H. Schneider considers it to be an early copy. The painting was transferred from the Hermitage to an unknown destination in 1928 and its whereabouts remained unknown until recently. We now know that it is in the Kazan Museum of Fine Arts in the Tatarstan Republic of the Russian Federation (inv. nr. Zh 434). Although covered with a layer of very discolored yellow varnish, the quality of the painting is high indeed and it merits further study.

A rare work in the Hermitage is a large *Still life of hunting trophies* (inv. nr. GE 3663, oil on canvas, 147.5 x 185 cm.), which bears Dirck Govertsz.' characteristic monogram, DG. Fred G. Meijer's research on this artist's oeuvre has led to the discovery of a number of previously unidentified works, to which the Hermitage painting can now be added. Judging from archival documents, the still life arrived in Russia in the first half of the 18th century.

Among the unpublished works are several very small paintings on panel. These include Jan Miense Molenaer's *Smoker* (inv. nr. ORM 1417; 11 x 8.6 cm.), in which the depicted figure is extremely close to that in the artist's *Hearing* of 1637 (The Hague, Mauritshuis) from his celebrated series of the Five Senses. Also kept with the miniatures is a *Virgin and Child* by Cornelis van Poelenburch (inv. nr. ORM 1167; 10.4 x 7 cm.), which entered the Hermitage in 1922 from the collection of the famous jeweler Agathon Fabergé, son of Carl. The type of the Virgin's face - eyes lowered, with the corners of the mouth turned down - is close to that of Mary in *The Crucifixion* (inv. nr. GE 1831), although there are no direct analogies for the composition. Nicolette Sluijter – Seiffert considers the Hermitage painting to be authentic (personal communication, 2009).

This paper presents just some of the new information that will be included in the Hermitage's complete Dutch painting collection catalogue, which is due to appear in the next few years.

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