NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Pieter de Hooch
Dutch, 1629 - 1684

A Dutch Courtyard

1658/1660

oil on canvas
overall: 69.5 x 60 cm (27 3/8 x 23 5/8 in.)
framed: 92.7 x 83.8 x 12.1 cm (36 1/2 x 33 x 4 3/4 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.56

ENTRY

In a walled courtyard behind a brick house, two soldiers seated at a table enjoy a moment's banter with a serving woman. While one of the soldiers puffs smoke from his clay pipe, the other, holding a Raeren earthenware jug, laughingly watches the woman drink beer from her pass-glass. The pass-glass was used in drinking games. Each participant had to drink down to a circular line on the glass; failing to reach the exact level, he or she would be required to drink to the next ring down. Only when this was done successfully would the glass be passed on to the next participant.[1] A young girl approaches on the right, bringing glowing embers for the men's pipes. The open door in the brick wall reveals a stepped path that leads past a wooded yard to a distant house, which is also visible above the wall. The tower of the Nieuwe Kerk in Delft rises over the wooden palisade on the far left.

The painting is one of the most accomplished of De Hooch's "Delft Style" works from about 1660. The ordered, harmonious arrangement of architectural and figural elements creates a quiet and peaceful mood. The soft light that pervades the scene and the careful way in which De Hooch indicates the bricks and mortar of the buildings and courtyard enhance the painting's naturalistic qualities. Its measured harmony also comes from the artist's sensitivity to color and the way in which he intersperses accents of red, blue, and white throughout the scene. Particularly effective is the satiny sheen of the young girl's blue dress, which he has suggested through the use of yellow highlights.

De Hooch achieved this sense of order by carefully manipulating the perspective and the placement of compositional elements. He strengthened the figural group by adjusting the woman's position and bringing her closer to the table, which was

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revealed by Infrared Reflectography at 1.2 to 2.5 microns.[2] He also seems to have enlarged the little girl and moved her nearer to the house so that she became superimposed over the juncture of the house and the rear wall of the courtyard. Her placement and that of the bright orange-red window shutter directly above her serve to reduce the strong sense of recession created by the receding perspective of the building.

The brick wall behind the figures is presumably a section of the old city wall of Delft.[3] As in *Woman and Child in a Courtyard*, this courtyard was probably situated in the area of the city near the Binnenwatersloot. It is nevertheless unlikely that De Hooch represented an exact location. As can be demonstrated in his other paintings, including *Woman and Child in a Courtyard*, he frequently combined architectural motifs in an imaginary way for compositional reasons. In this instance, he has also taken liberties in his depiction of the peaked roof of the tower of the Nieuwe Kerk: it lacks the small spires that actually ring the top of the tower.[4]

De Hooch's earliest genre scenes frequently depict soldiers sitting around a table smoking and drinking, attended to by a serving woman, a subject he has here moved outdoors into the courtyard of a middle-class home.[5] The men and women in these scenes are quite animated and playfully interact with one another, a pictorial approach also evident in the easy banter between the soldiers and the maidservant seen here.[6] The sun-filled setting with the distant church tower gives the scene an added sense of good will and optimism, one in which the threat of war that had so recently weighed heavily on the Dutch was no longer felt.

A replica of this painting is in the Mauritshuis, The Hague.[7] The major compositional difference between the two works is the absence of the seated soldier. This figure, however, does appear in X-radiographs [see X-radiography] of the painting and seems to have been painted out by a later hand. The breastplate worn by this soldier appears in other De Hooch paintings from this period, including *A Soldier Paying a Hostess,* which is dated 1658.[8] The Washington painting is shown hanging on the rear wall in a watercolor of a Dutch interior, dated 1783, by W. J. Laquy (1738–1798), a German artist then working in Amsterdam (see the 1995 archived version of this entry for the comparative image).[9] The drawing illustrates that the painting was then in a Dutch-style gold frame. The provenance of the painting before 1820 is unknown, thus we do not know in whose home Laquy saw it.

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NOTES

[1] For information on the "pass-glass," see the Rijksmuseum online catalog.

[2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Mitsubishi M600 PtSi Focal plane array camera.

[3] Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Pieter de Hooch: The Master's Paintings*, trans. Alice M. Sharkey and E. Schwandt (London and New York, 1930), 272.

[4] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–1842), 9:573, no. 30, incorrectly identifies it as the tower of the cathedral in Utrecht. The tower here varies a bit from the appearance of that of the Nieuwe Kerk, but it must depict that structure.

[5] See Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), nos. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13.

[6] These scenes probably reflect the influence of the Rotterdam artist Ludolph de Jongh (1616–1679), whom De Hooch must have known before moving to Delft and joining the guild in 1655.

[7] Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), no. 35b.

[8] Marquise of Bute Collection; Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), no. 27.

[9] Laquy's drawing was kindly brought to my attention by C. J. de Bruyn Kops, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The medium-weight, plain-weave fabric support[1] has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. A smooth off-white ground was applied somewhat thickly to the support. The ground is coated with a transparent brown wash that becomes thinner in the area corresponding to the sky. With the brown wash used as an undertone, De Hooch applied paint in thin, transparent layers. The impasted highlights are constructed of small dabs of color placed in close proximity, often overlapping. This technique produces a flickering effect, particularly in the flesh

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tones.

Careful visual examination and infrared reflectography at 1.2 to 2.5 microns[2] reveal a number of artist's changes. The little girl appears to have been raised slightly and moved about one inch to the right of her original position. The head of the standing woman may have been more upright as she raised her glass somewhat higher. An earlier position of her foot was painted out. The fence originally extended between the two seated men. The positions of the arm and the beer stein of the central seated figure were changed. A pronounced pentimento of the stein at the elbow of this man suggests that his arm was originally positioned farther back in space so that the stein covered the view of the elbow. In the background, the courtyard visible through the open door originally contained a second somewhat thinner tree trunk. The arch in the doorway is painted over both tree trunks, so the arch probably came at a late stage in the creative process. Finally the top of the building on the right originally ended lower, so that it did not continue vertically to the top of the picture space.

The paint is in good condition with little loss and minor abrasion, except for the trees in the background and a one-inch band across the top of the sky, which are severely abraded. Other areas of abrasion include the little girl's face, the woman's blue apron, and the cloak of the man seated in the foreground. The painting was treated in 2002, at which time the abraded areas were inpainted to bring them into harmony with the rest of the composition.[3] Records indicated that prior to the most recent treatment, the painting was treated in Holland in the 1930s.[4]

[1] Average densities of 13.9 threads per centimeter horizontally and 14.0 threads per centimeter vertically were measured in the original support by the Thread Count Automation Project of Cornell University and Rice University (see report dated May 2010 in NGA Conservation department files).

[2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Mitsubishi M600 PtSi Focal plane array camera.

[3] The NGA Scientific Research department analyzed the pigments using air-path X-ray Fluorescence spectroscopy (see report dated October 26, 1978, in NGA Conservation department files).

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[4] See note in NGA Conservation department files.

PROVENANCE

Cornelis Sebille Roos [1754-1820], Amsterdam; (his sale, R.W.P. de Vries, Amsterdam, 28 August 1820, no. 51); Isaac van Eyck.[1] (sale, Paris); purchased by a Mr. Mason; purchased by Baron Lionel de Rothschild [1808-1879], Gunnersbury Park, Greater London, by 1842; by inheritance to his son, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, 1st baron Rothschild [1840-1915]; by exchange with or sale to his brother, Baron Alfred Charles de Rothschild [1842-1918], London and Halton House, near Wendover, Buckinghamshire;[2] bequeathed to his illegitimate daughter, Almina Victoria, Countess of Carnarvon [c. 1877-1969, later Mrs. Ian Onslow Dennistoun], London; sold 1924 to (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);[3] sold November 1924 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. London, 1829-1842: 9(1842):573, no. 30.

[2] The Rothschild provenance information was kindly provided by Michael Hall, curator to Edmund de Rothschild; see his "Rothschild Picture Provenances" from 1999 and his letter of 27 February 2002, in NGA curatorial files, in which he cites documents in The Rothschild Archive, London.

[3] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 292, box 437, folders 4 and 5, and reel 293, box 438, folders 1 and 2; copies in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1939 Masterworks of Five Centuries, Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, 1939, no. 81a, repro.

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1998 Pieter de Hooch, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1998-1999, no. 19, repro., as Two Soldiers and a Woman Drinking in a Courtyard.

1999 Johannes Vermeer: The Art of Painting, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1999-2000, not in brochure.

2001 Vermeer and the Delft School, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The National Gallery, London, 2001, no. 33, repro.

2007 Vermeer: La ragazza alla spinetta e i pittori di Delft, Foro Boario, Modena, 2007, no. 10, repro.

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1927 Brière-Misme, Clotilde. "Tableaux inédits ou peu connus de Pieter de

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Hooch, Part II." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 69, no. 16 (July-August 1927): repro. 61, 63.

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