



Isack van Ostade
Dutch, 1621 - 1649

Workmen before an Inn

1645

oil on panel

overall: 66 x 58.4 cm (26 x 23 in.)

framed: 94.9 x 86.7 x 7 cm (37 3/8 x 34 1/8 x 2 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Isack van Ostade / 1645

Gift of Richard A. and Lee G. Kirstein, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art 1991.64.1

ENTRY

Although Isack van Ostade frequently represented travelers halting before an inn (The Halt at the Inn), the focus on the activities of workmen restocking an inn, as in this painting, is exceptional. Here a horse-drawn sledge has stopped before the mottled, brown brick façade of a rustic inn where two laborers strain under the weight of a keg of beer they are lifting with the aid of a yoke. The innkeeper stands in the doorway ready to direct them inside. Above him hang traditional Dutch symbols of welcome and promised conviviality for an inn: a beer jug and two barrel staves adorned with a grapevine. [1] Perched on the chimney is a stork, whose presence, as a traditional emblem of the traveler, was encouraged by innkeepers. [2] Around the building are sights that would have greeted visitors to such a village. A woman seated under a canopy sells her wares, probably pancakes, to an eager clientele of men and children. Near this group a lame man hobbles along supported by his cane and stick. Farther down the road a quack, standing before a large bulletin board, tries to convince his audience of the wonders of his cures. Adding to the picturesque character of the scene are the animals that occupy the foreground: a hen and a rooster scratch and peck, and two dogs lap up the water that has spilled over the edge of the trough, while a third dog, anxious to join them, is restrained by his youthful master.

Inns were the social meeting point for all facets of Dutch society. Whether a welcome wayside in the midst of the coastal dunes, an imposing building on a city square, or a modest structure in one of the villages that dotted the countryside, inns provided food, drink, a setting for business transactions, and occasional

lodging. More important, however, inns served as a forum for entertainment, whether it be conversing, gaming, or relaxation during the celebration of a *kermis* or other holiday. As is suggested in Van Ostade's painting, the environment might have been picturesque, but it was seldom genteel. John Ray, an English traveler who visited the Dutch Republic in 1663, described innkeepers as being "surly and uncivil." Ray also found the food hardy—stews, beef, pickled herrings, cheeses, bread—but rather basic and quite expensive: "Their strong Beer, (thick Beer they call it, and well they may) is sold for three Stivers the Quart, which is more than three pence *English*." [3]

In contrast to the horizontal format of *The Halt at the Inn*, which he probably also painted in 1645, Van Ostade chose a vertical format for this work. As a consequence this painting is composed along a single diagonal that recedes to the left rather than with the counterbalancing diagonals found in *The Halt at the Inn*. This dynamic composition reinforces the sense of activity and enlivens the streetscape. As seems to have been his standard procedure, Van Ostade must have composed this painting in his studio on the basis of drawings he made from life. A comparison with his *Halt at the Inn* of 1646 in Vienna [fig. 1] suggests how he may have freely adapted his models from one painting to the next: the hobbling man in the Washington painting certainly derives from the same prototype as does the man carrying a bucket at the left in the Vienna painting. Presumably similar modifications occurred with building and animal studies as well.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Isack van Ostade, *Halt at the Inn*, 1646, oil on panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo: De Agostini Picture Library / G. Nimatallah / The Bridgeman Art Library

NOTES

- [1] See Linda A. Stone-Ferrier, *Dutch Prints of Daily Life: Mirrors of Life or Mask of Morals?* (Lawrence, 1983), 216.
- [2] The stork always returns to the same nest, so innkeepers hoped that travelers would likewise return to their particular inn. There seems to have been no scarcity of storks in the Netherlands if one is to judge from the comments of John Ray in his *Observations Topographical, Moral, and Physiological; Made in a Journey Through Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy, and France* (London, 1673), 56.
- [3] John Ray, *Observations Topographical, Moral, and Physiological; Made in a Journey Through Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy, and France* (London, 1673), 50–51.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is on a single-board panel with a vertical grain. The original chisel marks are visible on the back. The ground is a smooth, light brown layer of medium thickness. It is allowed to show through the thinly applied paint layers. In the sky the paint was applied more thickly, with low impasto and strong brushwork.

The painting is in very good condition, although small, scattered losses are visible in ultraviolet light. Minor pentimenti in the large tree in the center of the painting and the dogs in the foreground are visible to the naked eye. The painting has not been treated since acquisition.

PROVENANCE

Van Tol collection; (sale, Souterwoude [near Leiden], 15 June 1779, no. 13);^[1] Wubbels. Jean Etienne Fiseau (variously spelled Fiseau, Fezeau, or Fiziau), Amsterdam; his widow, Mme Jean Etienne Fiseau [née Marie Anne Massé, d. 1790]; (her estate sale, by Philippe van der Schley et al., Amsterdam, 30-31 August 1797, no. 165); (Jan de Bosch, Jeronimusz, Amsterdam). Guillaume-Joseph, baron de Brienen van de Grootelindt [d. 1839], Amsterdam, by 1842; by inheritance to his son, Arnold-Willem, baron de Brienen van de Grootelindt [d. 1854]; by inheritance to his son, Guillaume-Thierry-Arnaud [or Arnold or Armand]-Marie, baron de Brienen van de Grootelindt [d. 1863], Amsterdam;^[2] (his estate sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 8-9 May 1865, no. 23); (Nieuwenhuys).^[3] Marquis H. de V., Paris;^[4] (his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 5-6 June 1871, 2nd day, no. 218); Comte Henri Greffulhe [1848-1932], Paris; (his estate sale, Sotheby & Co., London, 22 July 1937, no. 74); (Roland & Delbanco, London); sold 1939 to Adolf Mayer, The Hague. (Edward Speelman, London). private collection, England. (Duits Gallery, London); sold 1968 to (Christian Humann, Paris and New York); sold 1973 to Dr. Claus Virch, Paris; sold July 1977 to (Brod Gallery, London);^[5] purchased by Richard A. and Lee G. Kirstein, Washington, D.C.; gift (partial and promised) January 1991 to NGA; gift completed July 1991.

[1] In 1779, Hendrick Meyer (1744-1793) made a drawn copy of the painting (Amsterdam Historisch Museum, inv. no. A 10716), either when it was in Van Tol's collection or at the time of the painting's sale. See Ingrid Oud and Leonoor van Oosterzee, *Nederlandse Tekenaars geboren tussen 1660 en 1745*, Amsterdam and Zwolle, 1999: 120.

[2] The lacquer seal on the rear of the panel carries the heraldic crest of the De Brienen van de Grootelindt family. Genealogical information on the family was provided by the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague.

[3] According to an annotated copy of the sale catalogue in the NGA Library. This could have been either C.J. Nieuwenhuys, who was based in Brussels (and later London), or his brother, François Nieuwenhuys, who was in Paris.

[4] This was possibly Antoine-Marie-Albert Héron de Villefosse (1845-1919).

[5] Dr. Virch, in his letter to Arthur Wheelock of 4 June 1991 (in NGA curatorial files), provided the provenance of the painting from the Duits Gallery to the Brod Gallery. However, his information is at odds with the Duits Gallery Records, according to which Duits sold the picture on 30 July 1970 to “Mertens” (Box 38, no. 1946, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1948 A Loan Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Painting: The Collection of the Late Adolf Mayer, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio, 1948, no. 9.

1968 Loan to display with permanent collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1968-1973.

1977 Old Master Paintings: Exhibition of Recent Acquisitions, Brod Gallery, London, 1977, no. 20.

1991 Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1991, 72-73, color repro.

1997 Rembrandt and the Golden Age: Dutch Paintings from the National Gallery of Art, The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, 1997, unnumbered brochure, repro.

2015 *Class Distinctions: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 2015-2016, no. 51, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1829 Smith, John. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*. 9 vols. London, 1829-1842: 9(1842):132-133, no. 32.
- 1877 Gueullette, Charles. "La Collection de M. H. de Greffulhe." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 15 (1877): 159-160.
- 1907 Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. 8 vols. Translated by Edward G. Hawke. London, 1907-1927: 3(1910):466, no. 96.
- 1948 Allen Memorial Art Museum. "A Loan Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Paintings: The collection of the late Adolf Mayer." *Bulletin of the Allen Memorial Art Museum* 5 (1948): 8-9, no. 9, repro. on cover.
- 1977 *Jan van Goyen, 1596-1656: Poet of the Dutch Landscape*. Exh. cat. Alan Jacobs Gallery, London, 1977: no. 20.
- 1991 National Gallery of Art. *Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1991: 72-73, color repro.
- 1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 194-197, color repro. 195.
- 1997 Chrysler Museum of Art. *Rembrandt and the Golden Age: Dutch paintings from the National Gallery of Art*. Exh. brochure. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk. Washington, 1997: unnumbered repro.
- 1999 Oud, Ingrid, and Leonoor van Oosterzee. *Nederlandse tekenaars geboren tussen 1660 en 1745*. Oude tekeningen in het bezit van het Amsterdams Historisch Museum, waaronder de collectie Fodor 5. Edited by Hinke J. Wiggers. Zwolle, 1999: 120, fig. a.
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