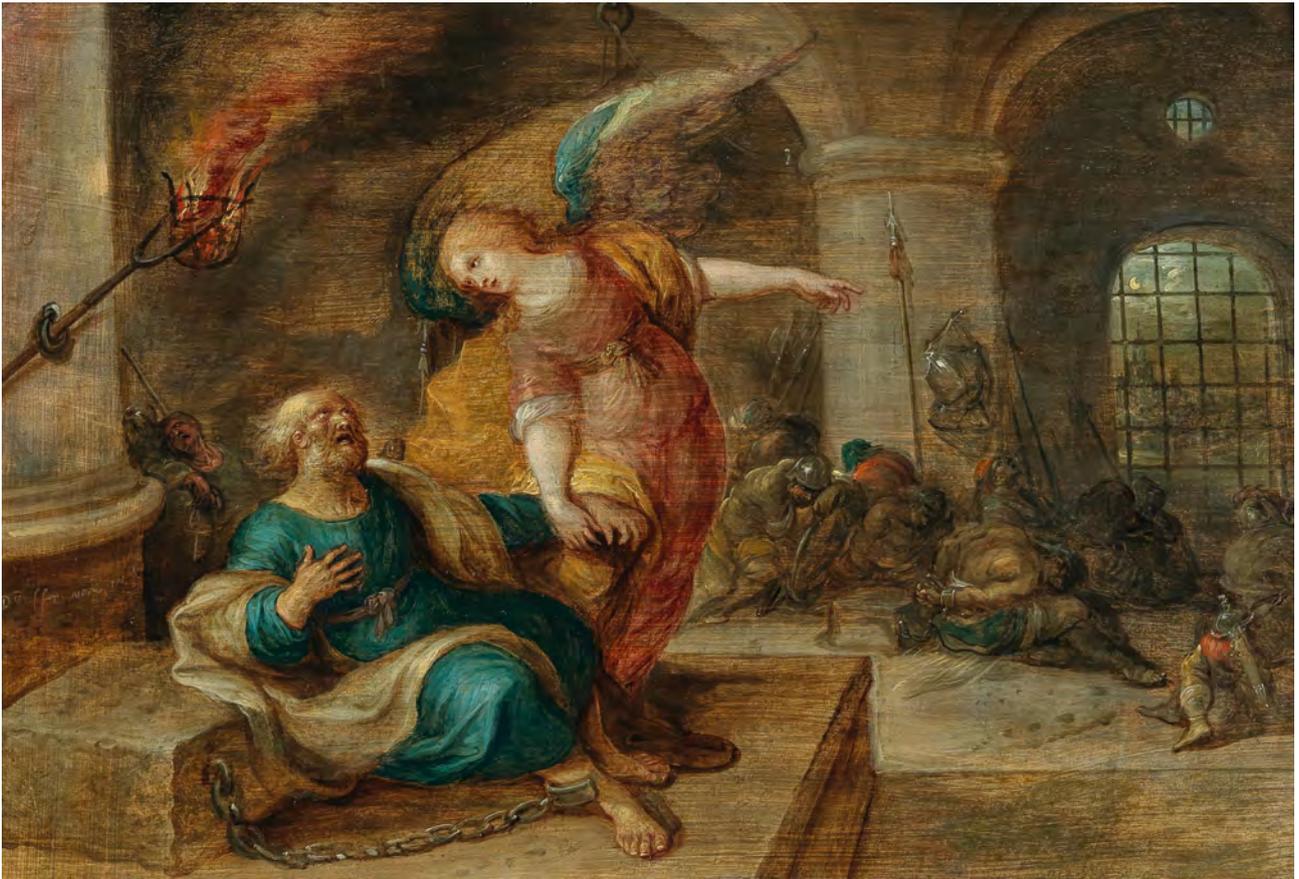


The Old Masters

by

Galerie LOWET DE WOTRENGE





Frans Francken the Younger
(Antwerp 1581 - 1642)

The Deliverance of Saint Peter

ca. 1630

oil on a single oak panel, uncradled
35,5 x 52,5 cm

Signed 'Do ffranck in f', on the column left

Provenance

Private collection, Brussels.



Tobias Verhaecht
(Antwerp 1561 - 1631)

An Italianate landscape with the ruins of a Roman villa

pen and brown ink, brush and washes on laid paper
197 x 267 mm

We are grateful to both Sarah Van Ooteghem (Museum Plantin-Moretus) and Dr. Joris Van Grieken (KBR) for confirming the attribution to Tobias Verhaecht.

Provenance

Private collection, UK.

Tobias Verhaecht was born in Antwerp in 1561, where he would spend most of his life. Before entering the Antwerp guild of Saint Luke in 1590, however, he had already spent some time in Italy as a fresco painter in Rome and Florence. In 1592 the young Peter Paul Rubens came to study with him for a short time; another pupil was his own son, Willem, who became a very important painter of *Kunstkamers* – his most important work is preserved at the *Rubenshuis* in Antwerp today.

Verhaecht mostly specialized in landscapes, often incorporating monuments he had seen in Italy in his compositions. For this purpose, numerous drawings he had made in Italy circulated in his workshop, where they were copied by his pupils. It is possible the present drawing was among these. Another version of this drawing is preserved in the Graphische Sammlungen Albertina (Vienna), while a third version is presently in the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam).

First, allow your eye to be drawn to the window vista to the right: the moonlight piercing the clouds and shining down on the city. Note the loose, almost impressionist brush strokes the artist has used to depict the sleeping guards and prisoners lying on the floor, before feasting your eyes on the brightly coloured scene to the left. This is a brilliant, mature work by one of the greats of the Flemish baroque.

Frans II Francken was born in Antwerp in 1581. His father, Frans Francken the Elder, is considered the founding father of the Francken dynasty of artists, which produced about a dozen painters, including a female artist, Isabella Francken. Frans II, or “the Younger”, was arguably the most talented among them, and definitely the most famous. He undertook several trips to Italy, where he probably first met Rubens. He joined the guild of St Luke in 1605; in 1614, he became the dean of the guild. In 1607, Francken married Elisabeth Plaquet ‘with the special permission of the bishop’. This may have had something to do with the fact that their firstborn son, Frans III Francken (who also became a painter and was trained by his father), was born before the end of the year. Francken was a member of the Antwerp rhetoric chamber *De Violieren*, for which he painted – in collaboration with Hendrick van Balen, Jan I Brueghel and Sebastiaen Vrancx – a very fine coat of arms, which is still kept in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp today.

Francken was a versatile and prolific painter, producing not only – often small-scale – mythological, biblical, historical and allegorical paintings, mostly painted on copper or panel, but also large-scale altar pieces. He was also an innovator with regard to subject matter, being among the first in painting genre pieces with monkeys and so-called *kunstkamer* or gallery paintings, depicting artistic and natural treasures in a collector’s gallery. He is also known to have produced small panel paintings as decorations for cabinets, a piece of furniture for which the Antwerp workshops were well-known. As a result of his artistic talent, innovative iconography and business sense, Francken became hugely successful. Already in 1607 he was able to buy a large house in Antwerp where he lived and established his large workshop. As a highly skilled figure painter, Francken often collaborated with others, painting the figures in their landscapes (Joos de Momper, Abraham Govaerts), architectural compositions (Pieter Neeffs) and flower paintings (Jan Brueghel the Elder, Andries Daniels).

The present work is a beautiful example of Francken’s mature style, when his figures had become less mannerist and more baroque in nature and his brushwork was more loose and painterly. On stylistic grounds, it can be dated to the late 1620's or early 1630's. This is also supported by the fact that the work is signed 'Do ffranck in f': ‘Do’ stands for ‘den oude’, or ‘the elder’, indicating that Frans III had already become active in the workshop, which he did in 1628.

The painting depicts the Deliverance of Saint Peter, an event described in the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 12), in which the apostle Peter is rescued from prison by an angel. Although it was the subject of some artworks from the middle ages onwards, it was not a very common iconography. Nevertheless, it was depicted by such masters as Raphael and Murillo, perhaps because it offered an opportunity to paint a nightly scene. Francken, too, depicts a beautiful moonlit see-through on the right, next to the impressively painted heap of sleeping guards and prisoners, while the presence of the angel illuminates the foreground.



Jacob de Wit
(Amsterdam 1695 - 1754)

The Head of St John the Baptist

Black chalk, white highlights on blue laid paper
295 x 420 mm

signed 'Jdwit.', lower left

We are grateful to Guus van den Hout for his assistance in cataloguing the present work and for confirming the attribution to Jacob de Wit.

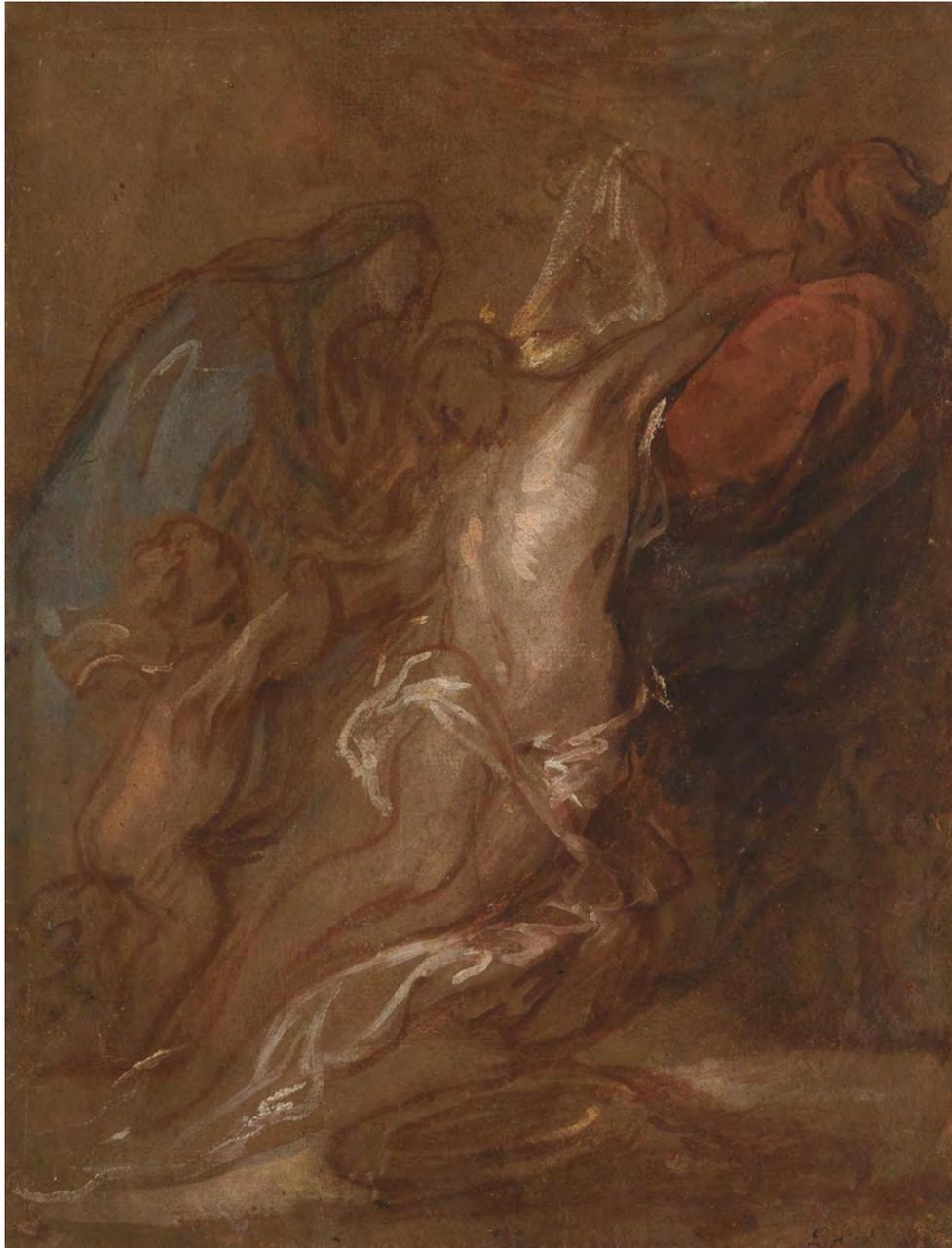
Provenance

Cornelis Ploos van Amstel (1726 - 1798);
his sale, March 1800;
Belgian private collection.

Jacob de Wit was born in Amsterdam in 1695. He received his first training, with the painter Albert Spiers, at the early age of nine. When he was thirteen, he went to Antwerp to study at the Academy. He became a pupil of Jacob van Hal, and went on to become a member of the guild of St Luke in 1714. While in Antwerp, he also produced a series of watercolour sketches of the ceilings decorated by Rubens in the Jesuit St Carolus Borromeus Church. As the church was struck by lightning a few years later and the ceilings were lost in the fire, these works, which were later engraved, became important historical documents. The work and style of Rubens – especially his cycle for the Borromeus church – were to leave a lasting impression on de Wit; the present work certainly also attests to Rubens' enormous influence on the artist.

In 1715, de Wit returned to Amsterdam, where he became a much sought after artist for his decorative paintings on walls, doors and ceilings. Wealthy patrons who lived on the *grachten* in Amsterdam commissioned decorations from him. As many of them also had country houses, de Wit did a lot of work in neighbouring Haarlem and Vecht as well. De Wit was a great illusionistic painter who often worked in grisaille.

De Wit produced a great number of sketches and drawings for his projects; many are kept in major institutional and private collections today. The present mature work, a beautiful example of a so-called 'picture drawing', made for a private collector, was probably executed in the 1730's. Interestingly, another version of this so-called 'Ioannes in Disco' (Head of St John the Baptist on a Plate) is kept in Teylers Museum, Haarlem. Our drawing was once in the collection of the famous Dutch drawings collector Cornelis Ploos van Amstel, who died in 1798. Beginning on March 3, 1800, his collection of over 7000 drawings was sold at auction; our drawing is mentioned in the catalogue of that sale under number NN6.



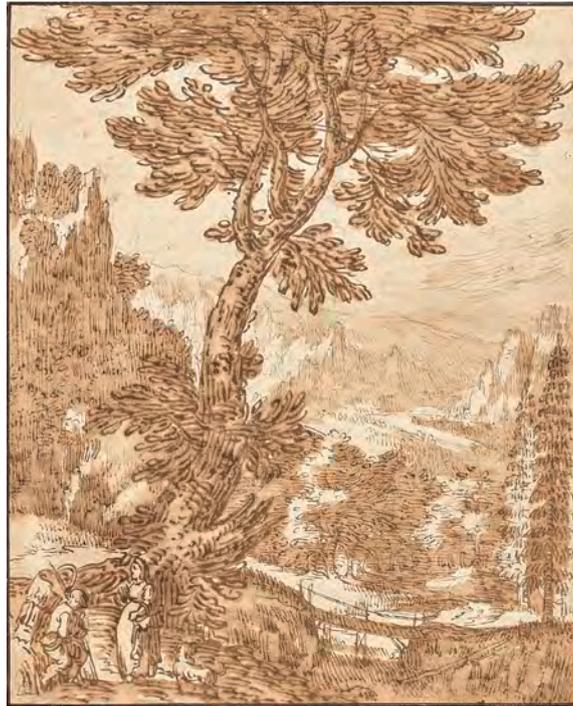
Lucas Francoys the Younger
(Mechelen 1616 - 1681)

The Lamentation

oil on laid paper
373 x 272 mm

Provenance

Elie de Talleyrand-Périgord, Duc de Talleyrand;
by descent to Manuel de Gonzalez de Andía, Duc de Dino;
Private collection, Antwerp.



Tobias Verhaecht
(Antwerp 1561 - 1631)

A Wooded Landscape with Travellers

pen and brown ink on laid paper
245 x 202 mm

Provenance

H. Danby Seymour (Lugt n° 176);
J.C. Witt collection;
German private collection;
French private collection.

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Verhaecht mostly specialized in landscapes, often incorporating monuments he had seen in Italy in his compositions. For this purpose, numerous drawings he had made in Italy circulated in his workshop, where they were copied by his pupils. The present sheet, depicting a couple of travellers near a suspended bridge in a forest landscape, is a beautiful, large and very well-preserved sheet, and very typical of Verhaecht's early work.



Victor Wolfvoet the Younger
(Antwerp 1612 - 1652)

Ecce Homo

Oil on copper
40,5 x 53 cm

We are grateful to Dr. Bert Schepers of the Rubenianum for confirming the attribution to Victor Wolfvoet the Younger.

Provenance

Private collection, Italy.

Victor Wolfvoet the Younger was born in Antwerp in 1612. His father, Victor I Wolfvoet, was a painter and art dealer whose oeuvre consists of only a few known works. The younger Victor may have studied with his father at an early age; it is more certain that he later on worked in the studio of Peter Paul Rubens, where he assisted in the production of works by the workshop. Wolfvoet married in 1639 and only became a member of the guild of St Luke in 1644/45. According to some, this accounts for his rather limited known oeuvre. However, as recent research on the artist had begun to shed some more light on his life and work, it seems that many works that were once attributed to Wolfvoet's contemporaries might be, in fact, attributed to him.

Wolfvoet was active in Rubens' workshop sometime in the 1630's and clearly had ready access to the latter's modellos and drawings, which he frequently copied. The cooler and crisper tonality of his paintings however is much different to Rubens', and Wolfvoet freely omitted, changed and added many details. His preferred medium were small, very thinly rolled copper plates, which allowed for a transparent and brilliant effect as well as being easily transportable.

Like many of his fellow Antwerp artists, Wolfvoet also engaged in collaborative projects, working with several leading flower painters by painting the *cartouches* in their flower garlands. A good example of such a work can be seen in a fine work currently in a private collection in Antwerp, where a scene with a Virgin and Child painted by Wolfvoet is surrounded by a very sumptuous flower garland by Jan van Kessel, who also signed the work.

Besides as an artist, Wolfvoet, like his father, was also active as an art dealer. An inventory of his estate after his death lists over seven hundred works, including twenty oil sketches by Rubens (amongst which were several designs for the ceilings in the Antwerp Jesuit church). Interestingly, the inventory also mentions several copies after Rubens' sketches, some clearly denoted as being in Wolfvoet's own hand (such as the pair now in the Mauritshuis, The Hague). The present work, while apparently not derived from one of Rubens' known compositions, still clearly shows the influence of the master, as Wolfvoet used motifs from drawings in Rubens' *cantoor*, combining them into a wholly new composition.