

# JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP5054

**DIRCK VAN DELEN**

**(Heusden, near s'Hertogenbosch 1604/5 – 1671 Arnhem)**

The Card Party



Signed and dated at the base of the door: *D.VAN.DELEN.f.1629*

Oil on panel, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$  ins. (32.4 x 47.9 cm)

Framed dimensions: 19 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 25 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  ins. (49.4 x 64.6 x 5.5 cm)

## PROVENANCE

Eugene Schwerdt, Esq., Brookline, MA & Antwerp

His sale, New York, Anderson Galleries, 28 April 1928, lot 46

Private Collection, New York

By whom sold anonymously ("Property of a New York Private Collector"), New York, Sotheby's

Parke-Bernet, 28 November 1951, lot 32

Private collection, Illinois, until 2023

Anon. sale, Sotheby's, New York, 27 January 2023, lot 453

## LITERATURE

*Nederlandse Architectuurschilders 1600-1900*, exhibition catalogue, Utrecht 1953, p. 10

T. Blade, *The Paintings of Dirck Van Delen*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota 1976, p. 219, cat. no. 26.

A party of elegantly dressed young people appears in a candlelit interior. The room, in the Dutch Renaissance-style, is lavishly decorated, with gilt-leather wall hangings, a coffered ceiling and tiled floor. Five men and a woman are gathered round the table, playing cards, their faces illuminated in the pool of light thrown by a candle. Two other men and a woman sit by the fire, chatting and smoking. A young woman playing a miniature harp entertains them with her music-making.

Dirck van Delen spent virtually all of his working life in Arnemuiden, a small port close to the prosperous city of Middleburg, in the south-western Province of Zeeland, where he was a member of the painters' guild from 1639 to 1665. Writing in the artist's lifetime, Cornelis de Bie described him in his *Golden Cabinet of the Noble Free Art of Painting* as being "... very excellent and experienced in the painting of perspectives, masonries, architectures and similar works"<sup>i</sup>. This description is to the point since van Delen devoted himself almost exclusively to painting imaginary church interiors, palaces and courtyards.

As has often been observed, van Delen's style has more in common with the Antwerp tradition of architectural painting, whose exponents included the Pieter Neeffs and Hendrick van Steenwyck families, than to the Dutch tradition of depicting true-to-life church interiors that developed in Delft and other cities after 1650. However, this is hardly surprising given that Middelburg is closer to Antwerp than to the major artistic centres of the Dutch Republic. Following the fall of Antwerp to the Spanish in 1585, Middelburg became a haven for Flemish artists and craftsmen fleeing religious persecution and the dislocation of war. A flourishing school of painting developed there in the first decades of the seventeenth century, which was especially renowned for its flower and landscape painters, many of whom were of Flemish origin. However, by the time van Delen reached his maturity around 1626-27, most of the prominent artists of the earlier generation had either died or moved away, and for much of his career van Delen was one of the only artists of note still working in the region.

Despite working in the relative isolation of Middleburg, Van Delen nevertheless kept in touch with artists and artistic developments outside his local area. He was no doubt well acquainted with the work of his slightly older colleague in The Hague, Bartholomeus van Bassen (c. 1590-1652), who, like van Delen, specialised in imaginary architectural views. He was also evidently in contact with his fellow artists in Haarlem, and, to judge from several signed and dated paintings executed in collaboration with the Haarlem genre specialist Dirck Hals (1591-1656)<sup>ii</sup>, he very likely spent some time there around 1628-29. His collaboration with the Delft figure painter Anthonie Palamedesz (1601-1673) and Jan Olis (c. 1610-1676) is also documented.

In the seventeenth century, architectural paintings - or 'perspectives' as they were often called - were highly prized by a small class of sophisticated collectors and connoisseurs who appreciated accomplished perspectival construction, spatial illusionism and refined execution. Such patrons were drawn from courtly circles in The Hague, and from members of the aristocracy and regent classes elsewhere. Van Delen it seems was able to tap into this wealthy clientele. He was himself a prominent figure in society, which no doubt helped in this respect: he married the daughter of a burgomaster of Middelburg and served repeatedly as burgomaster of Arnemuiden. He was also apparently well connected at the court of Prince Frederik Hendrik and its social circle in The Hague. Among van Delen's most prestigious

patrons there was Floris II van Pallandt, Count of Culemborg, for whom in the early 1630s he painted a series of five very large canvases (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)<sup>iii</sup>, for his residence on the Lange Vijverberg.

This attractive painting belongs to a distinct group of paintings that van Delen executed between about 1627 and 1635, representing elegant domestic interiors with gatherings of fashionable young people. Typically, they depict a deep, boxlike space with a tiled floor and coffered ceiling. The carefully drawn orthogonal lines and single vanishing point betray their indebtedness to the famous pattern books of the architect, designer and theorist Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527-1607), who himself lived in The Hague in his final years. Van Delen was evidently familiar with Vredeman de Vries's *Scenographiae sive Perspectivae* of 1560, as plate 10 (Fig. 1) from this publication provided the basis for several of his interiors. The figures that inhabit these interiors frequently represent 'merry companies' (*geselschapjes*) - that is groups of well-heeled young people engaged in pleasurable activities, such as feasting, making music and playing games. Another example of this type of secular interior, also dating from 1629, is in the National Gallery of Ireland, in Dublin (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Hans Vredeman de Vries, *Scenographiae sive perspectiva*, plate 10, Antwerp, 1560.



Fig. 2. Dirck van Delen & Dirck Hals, *An Interior with Ladies and Cavaliers*, 1629, on panel, 72 x 95 cm, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, inv. No. NGI.119.

This signed and dated painting of 1629 is highly characteristic of this type. An intimate indoor space is depicted in which a company of fashionable young men and women have assembled for an evening of entertainment. The meticulously rendered panelling, door and window surrounds, as well as the coffered ceiling and tiled floor all play a role in establishing the lines of perspective, which converge in the centre of the back wall, just to the right of the harp-player's head. The theme of this painting takes its cue from van Delen's colleagues in Haarlem and Amsterdam, where merry company scenes enjoyed a vogue during the 1620s and 1630s. Although as has been previously mentioned, van Delen sometimes joined forces with a figure specialist to populate his interiors, more often than not he seems to have painted the figures himself, as in the present case. Whilst the figures in many of his paintings appear dwarfed by the surrounding architecture, here they are relatively large in scale and play a major role in the composition. A careful examination of the painting reveals that the artist must have conceived the design for the figures from the outset and left reserves for them before painting the architectural setting. The skilful use of artificial lighting, derived from three candles and an open fire, is used to great effect, assisting in the articulation of space and adding a sense of drama to the scene. Although van Delen frequently depicted nocturnal church interiors, he rarely painted his secular scenes by night.

## BIOGRAPHY

According to the biographer Cornelis de Bie, in his *Het Gulden Cabinet*, of 1662, Dirck van Delen was born in Heusden, northeast of 's Hertogenbosch, around 1605. Shortly after his birth, his parents moved to Breda, but it is not known how long he lived there. Nothing is known about his training as an artist. Jantzen thought that he may have been a pupil of Hendrick Aertsz<sup>iv</sup>, an enigmatic painter of architectural fantasies, but this has been doubted. A more plausible suggestion is that he studied under Pieter van Bronckhorst (1588-1661) and/or Bartholomeus van Bassen (c. 1590-1652) in Delft<sup>v</sup>.

In 1625, van Delen married Maria van der Gracht, daughter of the burgomaster of Middelburg, in nearby Arnemuiden. The couple had settled there by 1626, the year their first child was baptised. Van Delen became a citizen of Arnemuiden on 31 March 1628 and later became the receiver of tolls and licences, a member of the town and church councils, and served repeatedly as burgomaster. He joined the Middelburg painters' guild in 1639 and remained a member until 1665. Van Delen's first wife, who was seventeen years his senior, died on 30 August 1650. The artist subsequently married Catharina de Hane, who died on 24 December 1652, and then on 8 December 1658 he married for the third time Johanna van Baelen, who passed away on 6 December 1668.

In 1666, van Delen visited Antwerp to collaborate with Theodore Boeyermans on a large allegory commissioned by the Antwerp painters' guild. He was in Antwerp again in 1668 and 1669, where he joined the *Olyftak* chamber of rhetoric. According to an inscription added to an epitaph that van Delen erected in memory of his three wives, which still hangs in the town hall at Arnemuiden, the artist died in Arnemuiden on 16 May 1671, aged sixty-six. Although he had at least one son, no children survived him. The inventory of his estate testifies that he was well-to-do.

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<sup>i</sup> Cornelis de Bie, *Het Gulden Cabinet, van de Edele vry Schilder-Const*, Antwerp, 1662, p. 281.

<sup>ii</sup> Dirck van Delen & Dirck Hals, *Banquet Scene in a Renaissance Hall*, oil on panel, 77.5 x 125 cm, signed and dated *D. Hals An 1628*. Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna, inv. no. 684; Dirck van Delen & Dirck Hals, *Elegant Company in a Renaissance Interior*, signed by van Delen and dated 1628, oil on panel, on loan to Frans Halsmuseum, cat. no. 674; Dirck van Delen & Dirck Hals, *Merry Company in an Interior*, signed by Dirck Hals and Dirck van Delen, oil on panel, 90.1 x 122 cm, sale Christie's, New York, 29 January 1999, lot 82.

<sup>iii</sup> Dirck van Delen, *Members of the House of Orange and other Noble Figures in an idealized architectural setting*, c. 1630-32, set of five, oil on canvas, various sizes, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. On loan to the Paleis Het Loo, Apeldoorn).

<sup>iv</sup> H. Jantzen, *Das Niederländische Architekturbild*, Leipzig, 1910/Brunswick, 1979.

<sup>v</sup> Van de Willigen/Kinkelder, (typescript 1993/1998), RKD, The Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague, under the biography of Dirck van Delen.