

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP5048

JAN JOSEFSZ. VAN GOYEN

(Leiden 1596 – 1656 The Hague)

The Village Fair



Signed and dated lower left on the wagon: *I V GOIEN 1627*

Oil on panel, 13 x 24½ ins. (33 x 62.4 cm)

PROVENANCE

With F. Kleinberger, Paris, 1903

Anonymous sale, Amsterdam, Frederik Muller & Cie., 28 November 1911, lot 21,
for 3,000 Florins

Erich von Goldschmidt-Rothschild (1899-1987), Berlin

His sale, Berlin, Paul Graupe, 23 March 1931, lot 4, for 2,600 Reichsmark

Adolph G. Hochbaum, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

By whose Estate sold, New York, Sotheby's, 17-18 May 1972, lot 84,
for \$26,000 to Brod

With The Brod Gallery, London

From whom acquired by the father of the previous owner,
Private collection, United Kingdom, until 2022

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, London, 7 December 2022, lot 11

EXHIBITED

C. Hofstede de Groot, *A catalogue raisonné...*, London 1927, vol. 8, p. 122, no. 472

E. Filla, *Jan van Goyen*, Prague 1959, reproduced

H.-U. Beck, *Jan van Goyen 1596-1656. Katalog der Gemälde*, Amsterdam 1973, vol. II,
p. 444, no. 986, reproduced.

LITERATURE

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Jan van Goyen*, 15 July - 1 September 1903, no. 4.

The son of a shoemaker, Jan van Goyen was born and brought up in the city of Leiden. After studying with several minor artists, he completed his training with the pioneering landscape painter Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630) in Haarlem. Although he was only with van de Velde briefly from 1617-1618, his influence was crucial for the formation of van Goyen's early style. Back in Leiden, in the first half of the 1620s, Jan van Goyen produced colourful little paintings, crammed with figures and lively incident, closely resembling those of his teacher. From about 1626/27, his style underwent a rapid transformation. In parallel with Salomon van Ruysdael (1602/03-1670) and Pieter de Molijn (1595-1661), his contemporaries in Haarlem, van Goyen began experimenting with tonal landscapes, concentrating on modest subjects drawn from the Dutch countryside. By the late 1620s, he had perfected his new manner of painting, characterised by simple compositions, with relatively few figures, and a severely restricted range of colours. Riverscapes, village scenes and dune landscapes become the predominant themes of this period.

The present painting, signed and dated 1627, is a transitional work, displaying features characteristic of van Goyen's early style, together with indications of the new direction in which he was moving. A broad village green provides the setting for van Goyen's village fair. A troupe of costumed players performing on a makeshift stage provides the main attraction of the day. The spectacle has drawn a sizeable crowd of country folk, who gather round, gripped by the action on stage. Three boys have taken advantage of a gnarled, old tree to gain a better view, while other people watch from the windows of a nearby cottage. One small child is trying to scramble onto the stage, while another peers down from the canopy above. In the left foreground, two men, with their backs to the viewer, stand upon a rustic-looking wheel-barrow, while on the right, three men arrive by ferryboat. On the far side of the green, crowds of fair-goers move from one tented booth to another. A church tower rises in the distance.

Both the subject of this painting and the compositional type, with its multiplicity of figures and motifs, are typical of van Goyen's works of the preceding years. The figures still play an important role in establishing a narrative, and the subject offers ample opportunity for anecdotal details. However, compared with his earlier works, the artist has begun to tone down his colours to hues of mainly greens, browns, yellows, and greyish blue. He has not yet adopted the unifying diagonal design, which he was soon to develop as a means of establishing a sense of recession, but he has viewed his scene from a lower, more natural vantage point and employed bands of deep shadow in the foreground to create an impression of depth. From 1628 onwards, van Goyen increasingly pared down the number and complexity of details in his compositions and radically reduced the range of his colours.

In this relatively early work, van Goyen has captured the animated and informal atmosphere of a country fair. This effect has been achieved in large part through the artist's spontaneous handling of paint and his lively characterisation of the figures. Executed on a fine oak panel, preserved in excellent condition, it is clear that the paint has been applied rapidly, using fluent, sketchy brushstrokes. In the more thinly executed parts, the yellow ground has been left to show through, lending an overall golden tonality to the sunlit areas of the composition. The underdrawing is also clearly visible in places, for example, in the outlines of the tree, in the profile of the man standing beside it, and around the top of the stage scaffolding

The representation of the country fair, or *kermis*, had been a popular subject in Flemish painting since the late sixteenth-century. The compositional and iconographic roots of many of the renditions of this subject can be traced to the *kermis* prints designed by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1569) around 1560 (Fig. 1). With the emigration of numerous artists from Flanders at the end of the sixteenth century, the peasant *kermis* was introduced into painting in the Northern Netherlands. The Mechelen-born artist David Vinckboons (1576-c. 1632), who settled in Amsterdam in 1591, did much to popularise the theme in his drawings and paintings of *kermises* and peasant dances, executed in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Later in the century, the subject was taken up by painters of peasant life, including Adriaen (1610-1685) and Isaack van Ostade (1621-1649), Cornelis Dusart (1660-1704) and Jan Steen (c. 1626-1679).



Fig. 1. Johannes and Lucas van Doetechum after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Festival of Saint George*, c. 1561, etching and engraving, 32.9 x 52.3 cm, Rosenwald Collection, The National Gallery of Art Washington, Inv. No. 1964.8.400.

The traditional country fair, or *kermis*, was religious in its origins. Fairs were often held to celebrate the feast-day of the patron saint of a rural town or villageⁱ. A religious service formed a central part of the festivities, but secular activities, such as eating, drinking, and dancing invariably followed, frequently giving way to drunkenness and general depravity. Owing to their Catholic origins and the opportunities they offered for immoral behaviour, fairs were roundly condemned by Calvinist preachers. Nevertheless, they continued to flourish in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, becoming increasingly secular and commercial in character. Quack doctors, gypsy fortune-tellers, itinerant pedlars and stall-holders could all be found at country fairs, along with theatrical performances staged by amateur actors, called rhetoricians, or *rederijkers*, or by *commedia dell'arte* companies of travelling professional actors who took their inspiration from the traditional Italian comedy theatre.

Here, the lozenge-shaped blazon hanging from a pole above the stage identifies the performers as members of a chamber of rhetoricians. Traditionally, such blazons were

decorated with the emblem and motto of a particular chamber, but the motif here is too cursorily painted to be recognisable. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many towns and villages had one or more of these amateur dramatic societies. For the most part, the *rederijkers* were local carpenters, joiners, tailors and other craftsmen, drawn from the trade guilds, but in the larger towns, distinguished poets and other learned literary figures could also be counted among the members of these societies. A surprising number of painters were members of chambers of rhetoric: in Haarlem, for instance, Frans and Dirck Hals, Esaias van de Velde, Adriaen Brouwer, and Job Berckheyde all belonged at various times to the local guild, whose motto was “Liefde boven al” (Love above all). At their weekly meetings, rhetoricians rehearsed recitations, plays and music, while their performances played a role in religious festivals, fairs, and processions, where they staged plays, spectacles and recited poetry. They also held competitions, where the literary compositions were judged, and prizes awarded. However, it is clear that the purpose of such gatherings of *rederijkers* was as much social as literary. Numerous contemporary references attest to a culture of heavy drinking, feasting and merrymaking among rhetoricians and their supporters.

This depiction of a village fair appears to be a unique treatment of this subject in van Goyen’s painted oeuvre. However, he addressed the theme a number of times in his graphic oeuvre. Already in the first half of the 1620s, he was exploring the subject in sketches made from life, as can be seen in two drawings in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. The first, his *Peasant Kermis*, of 1624ⁱⁱ, shows fair-goers crowding around stalls, and a drunkard displaying the consequences of overindulgence, while his *Village Kermis*, of 1625ⁱⁱⁱ depicts country folk dancing round a maypole to the strains of a fiddler standing on a barrel. Later in his career, van Goyen revisited the subject of actors performing on an improvised stage in several drawings, including one of 1651, in Berlin^{iv}, and another of 1653, in the Art Institute of Chicago (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Jan van Goyen, *Country Fair*, signed and dated 1653, black chalk, with brush and grey wash, on paper, 11.6 x 20.4 cm, Art Institute of Chicago, Inv. no. 1965.253.

BIOGRAPHY

The son of a shoemaker, Jan Josefsz van Goyen was born in Leiden in 1596. According to the Leiden historian Jan Jansz Orlers, from 1606 onwards he studied successively with the Leiden painters Coenraet van Schilperoort, Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg (1537/8-1614) Jan Adriansz de Man, a glass-painter named Clock, and Willem Gerritsz in Hoorn. After spending a year travelling in France, he completed his training in 1617-18 with the landscape painter Esaias van de Velde in Haarlem. On 5 August 1618, he married Annetje Willemsdr. van Raelst in Leiden, where he bought a house in 1625, and where he is often mentioned in documents dating from 1627 to 1632. We know that van Goyen had become acquainted with the marine painter Jan Porcellis (before 1584-1632) by 1629, as he is recorded selling him a house in that year.

In 1632, van Goyen moved to The Hague. Apart from sketching trips to a variety of locations in The Netherlands and beyond, he lived there for the rest of his life. He acquired his citizenship of The Hague in 1634, and was *hoofdman* (headman) of the painters' guild in 1638 and in 1640. In August 1634, he was fined by the painters' guild of Haarlem for producing pictures in the house of Isaack van Ruisdael (1599-1677), the brother of Salomon, in Haarlem. During the "tulipomania" of 1636-7, van Goyen speculated in tulip bulbs and suffered heavy losses. Van Goyen had three daughters, one of whom, Maria, married the still-life painter Jacques de Claeuw (1623-1694 or later) and another, Margarethe, married the painter Jan Steen (c. 1625/26-79). In 1651, van Goyen was commissioned to paint a panoramic view of The Hague for the burgomaster's room in the city's Town Hall for which he received the sum of 650 guilders.

Van Goyen was an extremely prolific artist: his oeuvre comprises more than 1,200 paintings and about 1,500 drawings. He obliged later art historians by dating paintings and drawings in virtually every year of his career from 1620 to 1656, making it possible to follow his artistic development closely. Despite his productivity, he had financial worries throughout his life. In addition to painting, he was active as an art dealer, broker and appraiser, and invested in property, but apparently with little success. At the time of his death on 27 April 1656, he was heavily in debt. The artist attracted many followers and imitators. Jan Steen was one of his pupils, and, according to Arnold Houbraken, he also taught Nicolaes Berchem (1620-83) and Arent Arentsz, called Cabel (1585/86-1632).

ⁱ In Bruegel's print, the celebration represented is in honour of St. George who is depicted with his attribute, a cross-embazoned shield, on the banner that flutters from the tavern on the right.

ⁱⁱ Jan Van Goyen, *Peasant Fair*, signed and dated 1624, on paper, 128 x 243 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Inv. no. RP-T-1884-A-A-395.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jan van Goyen, *Village Fair*, signed and dated 1625, on paper, 146 x 251 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Inv. no. RP-T-1931-175.

^{iv} H.-U. Beck, *Jan van Goyen 1596-1656, Katalog der Handzeichnungen*, Amsterdam 1972, p. 75, no. 209, reproduced p. 74.