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OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP4923

DAVID VINCKBOONS

(Mechelen 1576 – 1631 Amsterdam)

A Quack Doctor selling Potions and Remedies in a Square

Inscribed, on the portrait, upper centre: *A[e]tatis 36/1606[?]*

Oil on panel, 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{5}{8}$ ins. (32.8 x 52.4 cm)



PROVENANCE

Private Collection, The Netherlands, since at least 1950, until 2020

EXHIBITED

On loan to The Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, 16 October 1982 – 8 February 1987.

The painter, draughtsman and printmaker David Vinckboons played a key role in the development of genre painting in the Northern Netherlands in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Born in Flanders in 1576, he was only fifteen years old when his family settled in Amsterdam. His father Philips Vinckboons (1545-c. 1601), a watercolour specialist, trained him in the Flemish tradition. David's oeuvre comprises landscapes, genre scenes and history subjects. His Flemish origins are strongly reflected in his landscapes, which are indebted to the Flemish landscape painter Gillis van Coninxloo (1544-1607), who also settled in Amsterdam, and in his peasant scenes which are clearly descended from Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1567). He was also a pioneer of the fashionable subgenre of *buitenpartijen*, or outdoor Merry Companies. His influence was especially far reaching owing to the many prints made after his designs.

A Quack Doctor selling Potions and Remedies is characteristic of the lively genre scenes painted by Vinckboons in the first decade of the seventeenth century. In a cobbled square, close to the harbour, a quack doctor has set up his stall. A flamboyant-looking character, with ginger hair and beard, he engages us with a direct gaze. He has attracted a little crowd of curious onlookers. Children mingle with dogs and well-dressed townsfolk, as well as with rougher types: an unsuspecting man standing on the left is having his wallet stolen. Arrayed on a table are dozens of small containers, some trays, a box with lots of little compartments, a variety of tools and implements, a jug, and a pot on a stand, the contents of which is being stirred by a young assistant. On the shelves behind are bottles and flasks, and what looks like jars of snakes or lizards. Also displayed are documents bearing heavy wax seals – perhaps advertising the quack's credentials - and some paintings, including a portrait of the stallholder himself.

Representations of the *kwakzalver*, or quack doctor, who plies his dubious trade at fairs and markets belong to a long tradition in literature and the visual arts. He could be portrayed in a variety of ways – as a cruel deceiver, whose smooth talk tricks his gullible victims into buying his dubious remedies, or a figure of fun, with the pompous manner and antiquated dress of a player from the commedia dell-arte, or a symbol of duplicity. Vinckboons' contemporaries would have been left in no doubt that the stallholder depicted here, with his theatrical costume and gestures, was a charlatan of the first order. The gullibility of his audience is also emphasised by the pickpocket on the left and the man in the centre, clutching a moneybag, who has been duped into parting with his cash.

Although the stalls of quacks and art dealers feature in the background of several of Vinckboons' large *kermis* scenes, this composition of a quack doctor cum art dealer is unique in his painted oeuvre. There is, however, an etching of a very similar subject by an anonymous artist after David Vinckboons, which involves many fewer figuresⁱ. It is unclear whether the indistinct date (1606?) inscribed on the portrait within the painting is the actual date of execution. However, comparison with other works dated around the same time, for example, *Peasant Feast*, formerly sale Sotheby's, New York, 2015ⁱⁱ, or *Scene before the Village Inn*, in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlinⁱⁱⁱ, suggest that a date of 1606 is entirely plausible on stylistic grounds. Typical of this early period is the thinly painted, sketchy technique, and the lively characterisation of the figures.

This panel, which has only surfaced recently after more than fifty years in a private Netherlandish collection, was apparently unknown to Klaus Ertz & Christa Nitze-Ertz when they published their monograph on the artist in 2016.

BIOGRAPHY

David Vinckboons (also spelled Vinckeboons, Vinckbooms, and Vingboons in contemporary sources) was baptised on 13 August 1576 in the Flemish town of Mechelen. His father the artist Philips Vinckboons (1545-c. 1601) entered the Mechelen guild in 1573 and practised the local speciality of large canvas wall hangings painted in watercolours. In 1579, Philips and his wife Cornelia Carré moved with their young children to Antwerp, where Philips entered the guild and David became his pupil. According to Karel van Mander, David's earliest training was in watercolours like his father. When Antwerp fell to Spanish control in 1586, the Protestant Vinckboons family emigrated north, residing briefly in Middelburg, before settling in Amsterdam in 1591. On 8 October 1602, David was married in Leeuwarden to Agnieta van Loon (d. 1668), the daughter of a wealthy notary and sister of the painter Willem van Loon. Soon after their wedding, the couple moved to Amsterdam. They had ten children, six sons and four daughters, born between about 1605 and about 1630. In 1611, David purchased a house on the Sint Anthoniesbreestraat, where he lived for the rest of his life and which later served as a studio for his sons. Pieter, Philips, Johannes, Justus and David the Younger worked mainly as architects and cartographers, while his eldest son Philips followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a painter. The date of Vinckboons's death is not recorded, but he probably passed away in the last weeks of 1632. On 12 January 1633, Agnieta is recorded as a widow with eight children who were still minors, each of whom inherited 1000 guilders from their father.

ⁱ Anonymous artist after David Vinckboons, *Quack*, etching, 9.4 x 9.4 cm. See: Eddy de Jongh & Ger Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genreprints in the Netherlands 1550-1700*, illustrated p. 223, fig. 4.

ⁱⁱ David Vinckboons, *Peasant Feast*, signed in monogram and dated 1606, oil on panel, 24.8 x 32.1 cm, Sotheby's, New York, 29 January 2015, lot. No. 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Vinckboons, *Scene before a Village Inn*, dated 1608, oil on panel, 26.8 x 38.9 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldgalerie, Inv. No. 1561.