# Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit

A GIRL HOLDING A CANDLE
GEORGES DE LA TOUR
FRENCH, 1593-1652
GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

Vol. XVII MARCH, 1938 No. 6

# AN UNKNOWN PAINTING BY GEORGES DE LA TOUR

Although Georges de la Tour's work (1593-1652) was reconstructed through scholarly research as early as 1915, it was not until the "Exhibition of the Painters of Realism" in Paris in 1934 that he became generally known. In connection with this exhibition P. Jamot wrote: "The great revelation to which, I venture to say, no visitor could have remained insensible, was Georges de la Tour. Only a short time ago some of his finest masterpieces, as for example the *New Born* in the museum in Rennes, were attributed to one of the Le Nain. Others like the *Lute Players* in the Nantes Museum and the *Saint Jerome* in Stockholm were attributed to a Spanish painter. Today, Georges de la Tour, yesterday unknown, has become famous. This master of Lorraine who died in Lunéville in 1652 counts as one of the true originals, not only of the seventeenth century but of the whole French school."

In America the artist made his debut through an exhibition of his works together with those of the brothers Le Nain at Knoedler's in 1937, arranged by Louis Carré, an exhibition which was shown in several museums in this country, and also in Detroit. Only French collections had contributed to this exhibition with one exception: the Berlin museum had sent over the remarkable composition of *Saint Sebastian mourned by Saint Irene*, which was once owned and greatly admired by Louis XIII. This painting was at one time in American possession, curiously listed under the name of Jan Vermeer. When it was sold at auction in New York after the owner's death in 1927, it was acquired for the Kaiser Friedrich Museum through Dr. H. Voss, who first recognized the importance of the artist. Since that time this rare artist (by whom not more than a dozen paintings are known) has not been represented in any collection in this country. We are fortunate therefore that it was possible, thanks to the Founders Society, to secure a characteristic and charming example for our Institute: *A Girl Holding a Lighted Candle*.[1]

It is, like most paintings by De la Tour, a scene by artificial light—a candlelight effect such as we find in many paintings of all the various Northern and Southern schools in the seventeenth century. The tendency in Baroque art towards an exaggerated plasticity of forms favored strong contrasts of light and dark. Artificial light gave a better excuse for such contrasts than daylight, which had to be concentrated to an unnatural degree if the desired contrasts were to be accomplished. It is on account of these exaggerated chiaroscuro effects that painters of this period received the name of *tenebrosi* or *Kellerlichtmaler* (painters of cellar light). Artificial light effects can be found first in Venetian paintings of the sixteenth century in the art of the Bassani, who transmitted the interest to Greco and other Spanish painters. However, the greatest influence in this respect was exerted by Caravaggio, the Roman master (1569-1609), who within his brief lifetime inspired a following in almost all countries where Baroque painting flourished, and not least in the Netherlands where both Rubens and Rembrandt went through a Caravaggiesque phase.

But while the influence of Caravaggio was diminished in its intensity on its journey to the Netherlands by intermediary artists like Honthorst and other Utrecht painters, between De la Tour and the Caravaggio school we feel a direct connection. This can be explained either by the assumption of a journey by De la Tour to Rome in his youth (where other well known Lorrain painters like Callot and Claude went), by a meeting with some of the immediate followers of Caravaggio in France, or by a direct acquaintance with Caravaggio through his paintings, some of which were exported early in the seventeenth century outside Italy. De la Tour shows his connection with Caravaggio not only in his strong chiaroscuro, his simplified contours and compact forms of almost cubic shape but also in the treatment of his subjects; for his religious motives as well as for his genre scenes he likes to use (like Caravaggio) models of simple country folk. He differs however in certain essentially French characteristics: he is less dramatic and less brutal than the Italian master; he arranges his quiet lyrical compositions in a clear, constructive manner by vertical and horizontal lines in a way which connects him with the classical style of French painters like Poussin or Claude Lorrain; and he shows a subtle color sense whose delicate and warm nuances are quite unlike the hard and cool color harmonies of Caravaggio.

Our small painting also shows the compactness of form and simplified outlines of his larger compositions. The endeavor to restrict the composition to an arrangement of verticals and horizontals can be observed in the straight lines of the child's dress which are contrasted with the horizontal line of the hand carrying the candle. Yet in spite of the Caravaggiesque heaviness of type and form the figure has a charm which is typically French. The subtlety of the color combination—such as the light violet of the dress combined with the scarlet ribbon in front—remind us of French eighteenth century painting. These colors are applied with glazes which give them a transparency somewhat similar to Rubens' paintings. Even the darkest shadows, the violet brown of the girl's dress and curls, are full of delicate nuances, and are lighter in tone than most Italian paintings of this period.

The motive of a single half-length figure seen by artificial light appears in only one other composition of De la Tour, a boy holding a burning torch (a theme treated also by Greco) which however is known to us only in workshop copies. Our painting can be dated about 1640, in the middle period of the artist, as it is in style closely connected with the famous painting in the museum of Rennes, *The New Born*. Here there is a woman's figure at the right, seen in profile and holding a lighted candle in a manner very similar to our picture. The similarity shows that our artist's compositions are confined to a few types, which he repeats over and over. In this he can be compared with Vermeer who also to some extent lacked imagination and temperament, and like him he preferred to work out the same problem many times rather than to express his ideas in a variety of subject. And although Georges de la Tour is more limited in his artistic expression than the Dutch master, he executes his simple representations equally thoughtfully, so that he reaches in every painting a quiet, concentrated perfection.

W. R. VALENTINER

1. Canvas, H. 22⅝, W. 17⅜ inches. Accession number 38.8.

FIG. 1, THE BAGPIPE PLAYER
PIETER HUYS, FLEMISH, XVI CENTURY
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. E. RAYMOND FIELD

# PIETER HUYS

Since 1930, when our museum was fortunate enough to acquire *The Wedding Dance* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Flemish painting of the sixteenth century has taken an important place in our collection. But Pieter Bruegel is not an isolated figure. He rises like a sudden peak at the end of a chain of hills, the culmination of a tradition whose members are well worth more attention than is generally paid to them today. Antwerp, where Bruegel worked, was not one of the old art centers of the Netherlands. It first attracted an important group of artists after its sudden rise in the late fifteenth century to become the chief Atlantic port of northern Europe. Among its artists in the sixteenth century there were two traditions: the Romanists, led by Quentin Massys, who imported the Italian Renaissance forms of Leonardo and his school; and the native school or *droles*, who derived their inspiration both from Hieronymus Bosch and from the genre paintings of Massys. The *droles* include Marinus von Roymerswaele, Jan Sanders van Hemessen, Jan Mandyn and Pieter Huys, and of course, Bruegel.

These men (with the exception of Bruegel, who rose to a different category of thought) form a curious afterglow of mediaeval art mingled with elements that look forward to the seventeenth century. Like mediaeval artists, they were the children of a tradition and not greatly concerned

with originality in the modern sense of novelty of subject or composition. They made use of a few religious subjects which they repeated again and again, as well as certain stock genre subjects. Yet by sheer vitality and singularity of mind they attain nonetheless a character of the greatest originality.

Through the gift of Mr. and Mrs. E. Raymond Field the Art Institute has acquired *The Bagpipe Player*,[1] by Pieter Huys, which is an excellent example of the humorous realism of the *droles*. Neither the dates of Pieter Huys' birth or death are known. He became a master in the Antwerp painter's guild in 1545 and his work can be traced until 1580. He thus overlaps the career of Bruegel at both ends: Bruegel's first dated work is a drawing of 1552 and he died in 1569. Pieter Huys was first known as an engraver. With his brother, Frans, he worked for the great publishing house of Plantin and appears in the accounts of that firm from 1556 to 1580.[2] But in recent years he has been discovered as a painter. The Louvre has recently acquired a *Temptation of St. Anthony* (signed and dated 1547), on the basis of which another painting of the subject by him has been recognized in the Metropolitan Museum;[3] a third picture of the same subject (dated 1577) is in the Musée Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, and a fourth example is in the London art market. There is a signed *Torments of Hell* in the Prado and a *Miseries of Job* attributed to him in Douai. He painted *The Bagpipe Player* composition four times: in Berlin (1571), Brussels, Krems (Coll. Gottweig) and our own example, which comes from an old collection in Boston, Massachusetts.

Although nothing is known of Huys but his work, one can learn much from him about the course of art in his day. The sixteenth century was a time of transition from the purely religious art of the fifteenth century to the purely secular art of the Dutch seventeenth century. At the beginning of the process artists were craftsmen working away contentedly at the traditional subjects of Christian story. At the end artists were individualists painting from their own inspiration to express their own sensibility. Pieter Huys' two pictures in America show us two steps in the progression.

The *Temptation of St. Anthony* (Figure 2) in the Metropolitan Museum is an early work, closely related to the painting dated 1547 in the Louvre. As artists gradually turned from the formal religious subject to the secular subjects of the next age, they found a halfway point in such religious subjects as St. Anthony, or the prodigal son, or Susannah and the elders, which lent themselves to a lively narrative or picaresque treatment. The sixteenth century seems, however, to have had an extravagant love of the story of the hermit monk, *St. Anthony of Egypt*, whom the demons persecuted so unmercifully. In times when people were themselves assailed by so many doubts and horrors, men must have found a symbol of themselves in the poor monk; and the story which goes back to St. Athanasius in the fourth century became, after 1500, one of the most popular themes of Flemish art. Huys is in this picture still using the bright color harmony of the first half of the century—cool blue-grey, yellow, wine red, white and brownish black. Wherever human beings appear in the wild melée, they are the type figures of mediaeval art.

In *The Bagpipe Player*, which must have been painted in the late '70's, type figures have given place to living peasants, general emotions to the pungent flavor of individual character. No longer was it necessary to

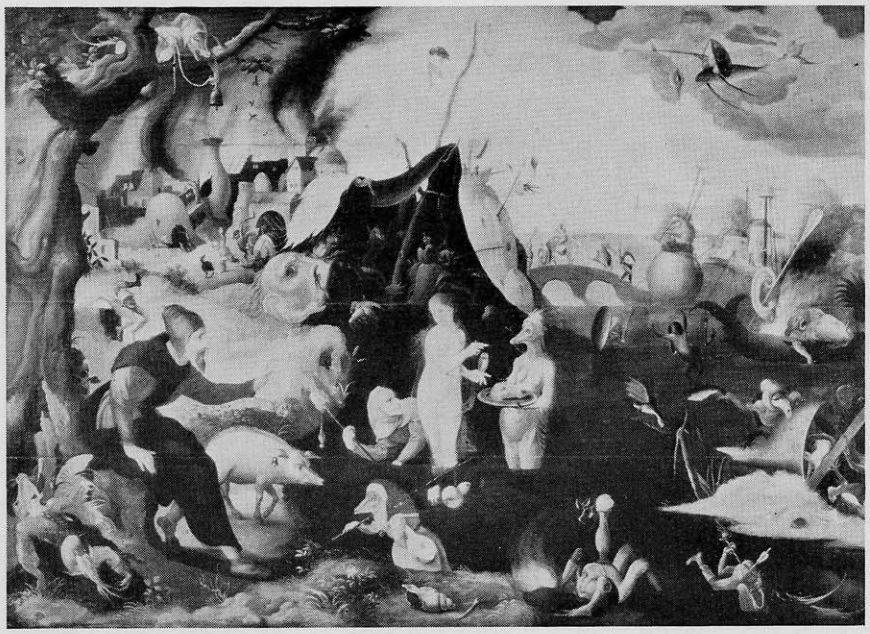

FIG. 2, TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTHONY, PIETER HUYS
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

find an excuse in the story of the prodigal son to paint the riotous humors of the taproom. The aim of painting is here human nature, which is studied as an end in itself.

The painting of *The Bagpipe Player* owned by the Brussels Museum is so similar to ours that it must be by the same hand. By some authorities the Brussels picture is given to Hemessen, to whose *Jolly Company* in Karlsruhe it certainly bears some relation.[4] These same models, however, occur also in the signed picture by Huys in Berlin. Moreover, I believe the style of our painting is too advanced for Hemessen, who died about 1575. It is executed in a color harmony of warm brown flesh tones, white, dusky green and rust brown against a black background. The paint is a thick impasto in the lights as well as in the darks. One forgets, as he looks at it, that the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt was still fifty years in the future, for we seem to be looking at a preliminary stage.

Pieter Huys was, however, a conveyor of tradition rather than an innovator. It is not surprising to find relations with Hemessen in his peasant types, as there are motives obviously derived from Bosch in his other works. But the vitality of his work, the handsome color, and the singular cast of his mind, well represent the *droles* who worked in Antwerp around Pieter Bruegel.

E. P. RICHARDSON

1. Panel, H. 21¾, W. 31 inches. Accession number 37.158. From the Wheelright Collection, Boston, where it has been since about 1800.
2. On Huys as an engraver and painter, see Bartsch, IX, p. 86; M. J. Friedlander in Thieme-Becker; M. L. de Fourcaud in Michel's *Histoire de l'art*, V, I, 299; A.—J. J. Delen, *Histoire de la Gravure, dans les anciens Pays-bas et dans les provinces belges*, II, 112.
3. E. Michel—*Peter Huys au Musee du Louvre*, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, XIV (1935), p. 151.
4. Fierens-Gevaert: *La peinture du Musee ancien des Beaux-Arts*, Bruxelles.

# ALGER HOUSE EXHIBITION OF PORTRAITS OF PROMINENT DETROITERS

The exhibition of Detroiters prominent in the life of the city during the past one hundred years which was shown at Alger House in January and February was one of unusual interest. The pictures were chosen from the two points of view of artistic merit and the significance of the subject in the political, cultural, and social life of the Detroit community. The men and women who have moulded the city in its phenomenal growth during the past century sat for artists whose work collectively illustrates nearly the whole development of portraiture in America over the past one hundred years. While the canvases from the first half of the nineteenth century reveal the inheritance of the classic English portrait tradition, those from 1840 onwards are increasingly romantic in their conception. The influence of continental schools, and the appearance of photographic realism distinguish the portraits from the end of the century.

In striking contrast to the earlier pictures are the portraits painted in the last decade, remarkable for their bright clear colors and their original and unconventional conceptions.

A complete list of the portraits exhibited follows:

*Dr. Marshall Chapin.* Artist Unknown, c. 1835. Mrs. H. L. O'Brien.
*Mr. C. Edwards Lester.* Charles Loring Elliott, c. 1845. Mr. C. P. Larned.
*Gov. George Bryan Porter.* Jacob Eichholtz, 1836. Mr. Oliver Phelps.
*Mrs. George Bryan Porter.* Jacob Eichholtz, 1836. Mr. Oliver Phelps.
*Mrs. Howard Bingham.* John Carroll, 1934. Mrs. Howard Bingham.
*Miss Joan Chapin.* John Carroll, 1937. Mrs. Roy D. Chapin.
*Mr. Henry D. Shelden, Sr.* John Carroll, 1937. Mr. Henry Shelden.
*Mr. Benjamin S. Warren.* Bradford Johnson, 1925. Mrs. B. S. Warren.
*Mr. Lorenzo Clark.* Roy Gamble. Mr. E. W. Clark.
*Edith and Dexter Ferry.* Lydia Field Emmet, 1914. Mr. D. M. Ferry, Jr.
*Mr. John Stoughton Newberry, Sr.* F. Percy Wilde, 1914. Mrs. J. S. Newberry.
*Mrs. John Stoughton Newberry.* Theobald Chartran, 1903. Mrs. J. S. Newberry.
*Mr. Henry D. Shelden, Sr.* Daniel Huntington, 1873. Mr. H. D. Shelden, Sr.
*Mr. William Gilmore Henry.* Artist Unknown, c. 1835. Mr. H. D. Shelden, Sr.
*Mrs. William Gilmore Henry.* Artist Unknown, c. 1835. Mr. H. D. Shelden, Sr.
*Mrs. Allan Shelden.* Eastman Johnson, 1885. Mr. H. D. Shelden, Sr.
*Mrs. Alfred E. Brush.* Lewis T. Ives, 1887. Mrs. F. C. Ford.
*Mrs. Ella Tefft Barbour.* Artist Unknown, c. 1863. Mr. W. T. Barbour.
*Mrs. Alexander W. Copland.* Emilie Slade, 1883. Mrs. A. W. Copland.
*Hon. Solomon Sibley.* Artist Unknown, c. 1825. Miss F. W. Sibley.
*Hon. William Brigand Wesson.* Artist Unknown, c. 1850. Mr. Wesson Seyburn.
*Mrs. Anna Henkel.* C. Highwood, 1863. Mrs. L. H. Haass.
*Mrs. Theodore H. Hinchman.* Alvah Bradish, 1851. Mrs. H. L. O'Brien.
*General Russell A. Alger.* Gari Melchers, 1906. Mr. F. M. Alger, Jr.
*Mrs. Joseph Campau.* Alvah Bradish, c. 1835. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Mr. William Henry Brearly.* Lewis T. Ives, 1884. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Mr. Joseph Campau.* Alvah Bradish, 1856. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Mr. John Storrs Willis.* William B. Conely, 1887. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Charles V. Bond.* Self Portrait, 1847. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*General Liggett.* Joseph de Camp, 1884. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Gov. Stevens T. Mason.* T. H. O. P., c. 1830. Estate of Mrs. Samuel Carson.
*Frederick E. Cohen.* Self Portrait, c. 1855. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
*Mr. John Boland.* C. Highwood, 1857. Dr. J. A. Kahanowicz.
*The First Board of Trustees of the Detroit Museum of Art.* Percy Ives, c. 1887. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

*Hon. John Biddle.* Alvah Bradish (?), c. 1835. The City of Detroit.
*Hon. John R. Williams.* Alvah Bradish (?), c. 1835. The City of Detroit.
*Hon. James A. Van Dyke.* C. V. Bond, 1855. The City of Detroit.
*Hon. Hazen S. Pingree.* Artist Unknown, c. 1890. The City of Detroit.
*Hon. James Valentine Campbell.* Alvah Bradish, 1850. The Detroit Public Library.
*Arent Schuyler de Peyster.* Artist Unknown, c. 1780. The Detroit Public Library.
*Mr. Franklin Sawyer, Jr.* Alvah Bradish, c. 1840. The Detroit Public Library.
*Hon. Lewis Cass.* Artist Unknown, c. 1825. The Detroit Public Library.
*Hon. George Van Ness Lothrop.* Alvah Bradish, 1852. The Detroit Public Library.
*Hon. Alexander Witherell Buel.* Artist Unknown, c. 1827. Mrs. C. B. Warren.
*Mr. Russell A. Alger.* Ellen Emmett Rand. Phillips Academy, Andover.
*Miss Sallie Gail Harris.* Simon Elwes, 1937. Mrs. J. H. Harris.
*Mr. Henry Ford.* C. Bennett Linder, 1926. Mr. Henry Ford.
*Mr. Edsel B. Ford.* Diego Rivera, 1932. Mr. E. B. Ford.
*Mr. Robert H. Tannahill.* Diego Rivera, 1932. Mr. R. H. Tannahill.
*Mrs. Henry Munro Campbell, Jr.* William Merritt Chase, c. 1908. Mr. H. M. Campbell.
*Mr. Julian H. Harris.* William Orpen. Mrs. J. H. Harris.
*Mrs. E. G. Holden.* Lewis T. Ives, 1874. Mr. J. S. Holden.
*John Trumbull.* John Trumbull. Mrs. C. H. Metcalf.
*Mr. Dexter M. Ferry.* Lewis T. Ives, c. 1880. Mr. D. M. Ferry.

# CALENDAR FOR MARCH

## EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition Galleries: MODERN ITALIAN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, March 1-20.

Alger House: FINE BOOKS AND BOOK ILLUSTRATION FROM THE XII TO XX CENTURY.

## EVENTS

| March | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tuesday | 1 | 2:00 | Pageant of History: *The Dawn of Civilization*, Mrs. Heath. |
| Wednesday | 2 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: *Prints and Textiles.* |
| Thursday | 3 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Sunday | 6 | | Because of the discontinuance of Station CBW the radio talks on The Human Side of Art have been temporarily cancelled. |
| Wednesday | 9 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: *Colonial America and Georgian England.* |
| Thursday | 10 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Tuesday | 15 | 2:00 | Pageant of History: *The Egyptians.* |
| Wednesday | 16 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: *Nineteenth Century Europe.* |
| Thursday | 17 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Wednesday | 23 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: *Nineteenth Century America.* |
| Thursday | 24 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |
| Tuesday | 29 | 2:00 | Pageant of History: *Greece.* |
| Wednesday | 30 | 3:30 | Gallery Talk: *Twentieth Century Painting and Sculpture.* |
| Thursday | 31 | 7:45 | Gallery Talk: Repeated. |

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, OCTOBER TO MAY INCLUSIVE, AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT. ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE POST OFFICE AT DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNDER DATE OF OCTOBER 29, 1934. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE $1.00 PER YEAR.