

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



TWO COURT FOOLS
ATTRIBUTED TO FRANS FLORIS
c. 1516—1570
GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

TWO COURT FOOLS BY FRANS FLORIS

In all ages artists have insisted that a work of art is sufficient unto itself and that documentary information about a picture is extraneous to what the eye perceives. No age has insisted upon this more loudly than our own, which has seen whole schools of abstract art, as it were, sworn and devoted entirely to the illustration of that truth. But, with human inconsistency, this is also the great age of documents. A picture without documents today is a poor naked orphan indeed; for even an abstract painting by Picasso is as weightily equipped with documents as an old master with a pedigree of royal collections, although an abstraction arrayed with documents is a sight to make Olympus smile.

The museum has nonetheless in the past acquired paintings for their great esthetic and cultural importance without a definite attribution. (The *Profile Portrait* by Verrocchio or Leonardo is one example, the Venetian group painting by Titian and collaborators another.) It has again had the good fortune to acquire a Flemish painting of *Two Court Fools*,¹ of about 1560, a picture of the greatest interest and esthetic importance, about whose attribution there may be some uncertainty.

This painting is an extraordinary work of the moment in the history of art when artists in the Netherlands first decisively turned from the sacred types of Christianity to that study of every day life and character in which no other artists have rivalled them. Friedländer wrote of it a few years ago, when it was in private hands in Paris, "In intensity of expression this unprecedented picture falls in no way short of the works of Bruegel who,

indeed, in the observation of individuals, does not go quite so far".² The *Wedding Dance*, which must have been done within ten years of this painting, is an example of the exhilaration of that first plunge into the spectacle of human nature, of which our new picture is also a witness. But Bruegel painted for the booksellers and art dealers of Antwerp while the painter of our new panel was of the court circle. The clothes of these two strange figures are rich black broadcloth and their linen is fine and white; they are no rough peasants or ragged beggars but pets of the court. The one on the left is the dwarf of Cardinal Granvelle, the great minister of the Stadholder Margaret of Parma, who was painted again by Antonio Moro standing beside a mastiff in a portrait now in the Louvre. A century later Velasquez also made masterpieces of his studies of the cripples and idiots whom the Spanish court still kept as pets.

The fact that Antonio Moro has painted the same dwarf creates a connection which has led to one attribution of this picture to him. But in Moro's painting the dwarf is a figure of morose and melancholy dignity, like all of Moro's sitters, while here a genuine restless, satiric and comic spirit is present in both figures. Neither does this composition agree in either technique or pose with Moro's unvarying formula. Friedländer attributed our painting hesitantly to Lambert Lombard on the basis of a resemblance between these remarkably painted and eloquent hands and those of a portrait of Lambert Lombard in Liège. Lombard, a scholarly, mannered, humanist painter, was an important teacher of the Italian man-

ner but not an important or forceful painter. There are two versions of his portrait. One in Cassel, which Goldschmidt³ believes to be the self-portrait, is quite different in color from our painting. The portrait in Liège is also called a self-portrait but Hulin de Loo⁴ quite definitely attributes it on grounds of style to Lombard's greatest pupil, Frans Floris. It fits very well, in fact, with two famous portraits indubitably by Floris, *The Falconer* (signed and dated 1558) in Brunswick, and *The Falconer's Wife* in the Museum at Caen in Normandy. The portrait of this latter, a fat, jolly, shrewd and lively dame who sits holding a wolf hound at her knee with one plump hand and grasping the arm of her chair energetically with the other, is especially like our picture. It has the same vitality and humor and the same air of only momentarily suspended movement of an active personality. It is more of a set portrait and is carried further in details of execution than the *Two Court Fools*, which is quite informal and sketchy in execution. But the head of *The Falconer's Wife*, posed in full front view, shows the same remarkably bold and simple observation of the eyes that is so marked a characteristic of the *Fools*, the same bold swift brush stroke at the junction of hair and forehead, the same plump, stubby, eloquent hands, the same simple, geometric yet striking treatment of the silhouette. The color, too, is that of Floris; the flesh tones ruddy in the light, with a cool blue middle tone and blackish-blue shadows; the browns of the wood panels and costumes shot through with bluish notes. With all deference to other opinions and to the uncertainties of an obscure period, I believe that this picture is a capital work of Frans Floris and one which goes far to explain the extraordinary reputation he enjoyed in his own day.

Ludovico Guicciardini, nephew of the great Florentine historian, who was the most intelligent and subtle foreign observer of the Netherlands at this period, wrote of Floris as not only the foremost living painter of Belgium but the greatest north of the Alps (1567). Van Mander, the best native source, devotes to him one of the longest biographies in his book of the Dutch and Flemish painters (1604). His pictures continued to command good prices at sales through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; but the nineteenth century revival of interest in the early art of the Netherlands leaped over him and his generation to the great primitives. Floris was not a primitive; rather he was looked on by his own day as the only Flemish rival of the late Renaissance in the mastery of the nude figure and of Michelangesque design, and therefore, as Van Mander expressed it, "the glory of painting in the Netherlands." Van Mander defends his "fine, bold brush strokes" against Vasari, who formed his opinion of Floris only from prints, and our picture shows as bold a touch in some parts as a Hals.

Frans Floris was born about 1516, one of four gifted sons of Cornelis Floris, a sculptor of Antwerp. He was first a sculptor and metal worker but at twenty he became a pupil of Lambert Lombard, who was one of the principal sources of the taste for Italian mannerism in the Netherlands. In 1540 he was a free master in the Antwerp guild. He went to Italy, as might be expected, and there made special study of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (finished in 1541) which exercised an overpowering effect upon contemporary taste. Back in the Netherlands, his large figure compositions in this style, executed with great facility (a century and a half later Houbraken spoke of him as the outstanding example of rapid execution

among the painters of the Netherlands) combined with his genial personality, brought him great success. According to Van Mander the great figures of the country, Knights of the Golden Fleece, the Prince of Orange, the Counts of Egmont and Horn, used to like to visit his house, to drink and banquet, in spite of the vile temper of his scolding wife. To please the latter, who seems to have been as dismal a

termagant as one could imagine, he built a palace of a house, ran into debt and trouble, and gradually subsided from a prodigious painter to a prodigious drunkard. He died in 1570 and his reputation has since followed the course of sixteenth century art, sinking when it did in the nineteenth century, rising again with the renewed understanding of today.

E. P. RICHARDSON.

1 Panel. H. 25½ inches. W. 21 inches.

2 *Altniederländische Malerei*, XIII, p. 57.

3 Adolph Goldschmidt, *Jahrb. der Preuss. Kunstsamml.*, 1919, pp. 206 ff.

4 Hulín de Loo, *Catalog of the Loan Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art*, Burlington House, 1927, No. 223, note.

THE GROWTH OF THE COLLECTION OF EARLY AMERICAN SILVER

The past three years have shown an important growth in the Institute's collection of early American silver. During that time a dozen pieces of high quality have been added as gifts from the Founders Society through the Gibbs-Williams Fund. These include a coffee pot, two teapots, a paten, two tankards, three casters, a two-handled cup, a salver, and a mug. All but three of these examples were made in Boston; of the remainder, two came from Newport and one from Philadelphia.

Earliest of the Boston pieces is the paten by Edward Webb (d.1718), which belonged at one time to Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire. Such a paten was used originally for sacramental bread in church services, later it was fashioned for domestic purposes and called a tazza. Our example is extremely plain, with a molded rim and truncated base. Slightly later in date is the coffee pot by John Burt (1691—1745), made about 1725. The body is tapering and cylindrical, with a molded rim and base, domed cover, swan's neck spout and scrolled ebony handle. The en-

graved crest on one side contains the initials of David and Mary Grimm of Boston, original owners of the piece.

Working at identically the same time as John Burt was Thomas Millner (1690—1745), who made the two-handled cup recently acquired by the Institute. This cup, probably used for hot drinks, has an ogee body curving inward at the bottom to a molded and splayed foot. The lip is slightly inverted and the handles are composed of double scrolls. A mid-band circles the body immediately above the juncture of the handle. On one side are engraved the initials I W, with foliate scroll above and below.

Another Boston silversmith active in the first half of the eighteenth century was John Potwine (1698—1792), maker of our octagonal caster, an article of household use that appears to have received its name from the act of "casting" salt or pepper from the receptacle. For that purpose the top is pierced, often in an arabesque pattern. Comparing our piece with a very similar one by John Burt, illustrated in Francis H. Bigelow's



OVAL TEAPOT WITH EBONY HANDLE
PAUL REVERE
1735—1818



TWO-HANDLED CUP
THOMAS MILLNER
1690—1745



TANKARD
SAMUEL VERNON
1683—1737

"Historic Silver of the Colonies and its Makers" and dated 1732, it is safe to date the Potwine example as second quarter of the century.

John Hurd (1702—1758) is the Boston silversmith most fully represented in the Institute's collection. Some years ago the Founders Society acquired a fine bowl and teapot by him; recently was added a mug with reeded lip, hollow S-scrolled handle and molded flaring foot. The front is engraved with the Pierce coat-of-arms bearing the motto DEUS MIHI SOL. John Clark (active 1754) is responsible for the fine salver, with scalloped margin interrupted by shell ornament and supported on three feet.

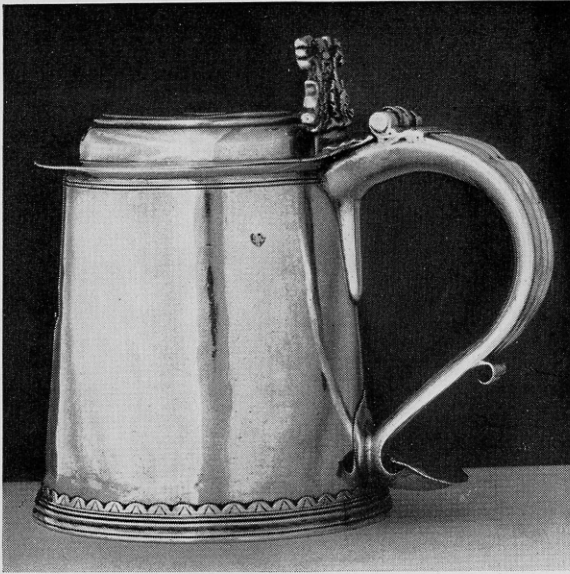
In point of time the latest Boston silversmiths to be represented in the recent acquisitions are Benjamin Burt (1729—1805) and Paul Revere (1735—1818. Burt, son of the John Burt previously described, has stamped his name on the pair of plain baluster-shaped casters, with tops pierced and engraved with panels of arabesque and

trellis, terminating in a pineapple. Revere, famed also as patriot and engraver, here proves his skill as silversmith in fashioning a beautiful teapot, with oval shaped body, fluted sides, tapered spout and ebony looped handle. The lid is slightly domed and surmounted by an ebony knob. Sides and spout are bright cut. This piece is illustrated on page 139 of Seymour B. Wyler's recent "The Book of Old Silver".

From Newport came the two tankards, one by Samuel Vernon (1683—1737), the other by Samuel Casey (c. 1724—1770). Tankards were very popular in all beer drinking countries throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and many were made in America. The example by Vernon illustrates the flat-topped seventeenth century type, which appears to have been made in New England from about 1690 to 1730. The cylindrical body is tapered, the rim and base molded. The cover has an over-hanging lid and scrolled billet.



COFFEE POT (c. 1725)
JOHN BURT
1691—1745



TANKARD
SAMUEL CASEY
c. 1724—1770

The hollow handle is S-scrolled with a strap hinge; the thumb piece consists of a mask between two dolphins. A feature of the decoration is a border of cut acanthus leaves above the base molding, a form of adornment often used by the New York silversmiths, but seldom by the New England ones.

The Casey tankard illustrates the dome-topped eighteenth century type that appeared in New England about 1715 and continued well on into the century. The dome is topped by a finial, similar in form to that used on highboys, clocks, etc. The finial seems to have been the product of New England silversmiths, as were the cherub heads and masks with which the handles frequently terminated; they are rarely found on English pieces. The chased mask on the Casey tankard is particularly fine.

Daniel Van Voorhis, of Philadelphia (fl. 1782—1787) and New York

(fl. 1787—1797), completes the names of American makers whose work has recently been acquired. He is responsible for the large straight-sided oval teapot with tapered spout and looped ebony handle, the cover surmounted by a pineapple finial. The sides are bright cut with octagon medallions, one of which contains a monogram.

Fine proportions, simplicity of decoration, careful, sound workmanship are the characteristics of the silver under discussion. It is obviously the work of sober, honest, self-reliant artisans; as a matter of accurate fact, the early American silversmiths were men of high character, occupying important civic positions. Their efforts were productive of work that compares favorably with the best of European silver.

ROBERT H. TANNAHILL

MUSEUM NOTES

Twenty-one works of art from our permanent collections will be on loan at the two world's fair exhibitions at New York and San Francisco this summer. For his Masterpieces of Art exhibition (May 15 to October 30) at the New York World's Fair, Dr. Valentiner has asked for the following works of art: Rembrandt, *The Visitation*; Van Eyck and Petrus Christus, *St. Jerome in his Study*; Titian, *Man With a Flute* and *Judith With the Head of Holofernes*; Bruegel, *The Wedding Dance*; Rubens, *Portrait of his Brother Philip Rubens*; Hercules Seghers, *River Landscape*; Master of the St. George Codex, *Crucifixion*; School of Giotto, *Crucifixion*; Nino Pisano, *Madonna and Child*; Luca della Robbia, *Madonna and Child*. For the Palace of Fine Arts exhibition (February 28 to December 2) at the Golden Gate International Exposition Dr. Heil asked for and received the loan of four paintings: Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child*; Guercino,

Christ and the Woman of Samaria; Kokoschka, *View of Jerusalem*; Casorati, *Icarus*.

Both the New York and San Francisco exhibitions will be briefly discussed by Mr. Morse in his lectures on "New York City" and "The Western Cities".

Those who are interested in the work of the art departments of the Detroit public school system (and the quality of their work deserves wide interest) will have an opportunity to see exhibitions of the public schools and of Wayne University in the ground floor galleries of the Art Institute during May. The exhibit of the art department of the public schools will open Tuesday evening, May 16, and will continue through May 28. The exhibit of the art department of the College of Liberal Arts of Wayne University will open Tuesday evening, May 31, and will remain through June 12.

CALENDAR FOR MAY

EXHIBITIONS

May 2—31: Masterpieces of Persian Architecture: photographs by the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology. May 2—28: Chinese Objects of Art from Detroit and Vicinity.

Alger House: April 22—May 7: Grosse Pointe Artists Exhibition. May 9—23: Photographs of Post-war Buildings in America.

WHAT TO SEE IN AMERICAN MUSEUMS

A special series of four Tuesday evening lectures for summer travelers in America, given in the lecture hall at 8:30 by John D. Morse.

May 2: *New England and the Atlantic Cities*.

May 9: *New York City*.

May 16: *The Great Lakes*.

May 23: *The Western Cities*.

Admission to the building and to all lectures and exhibitions is free.