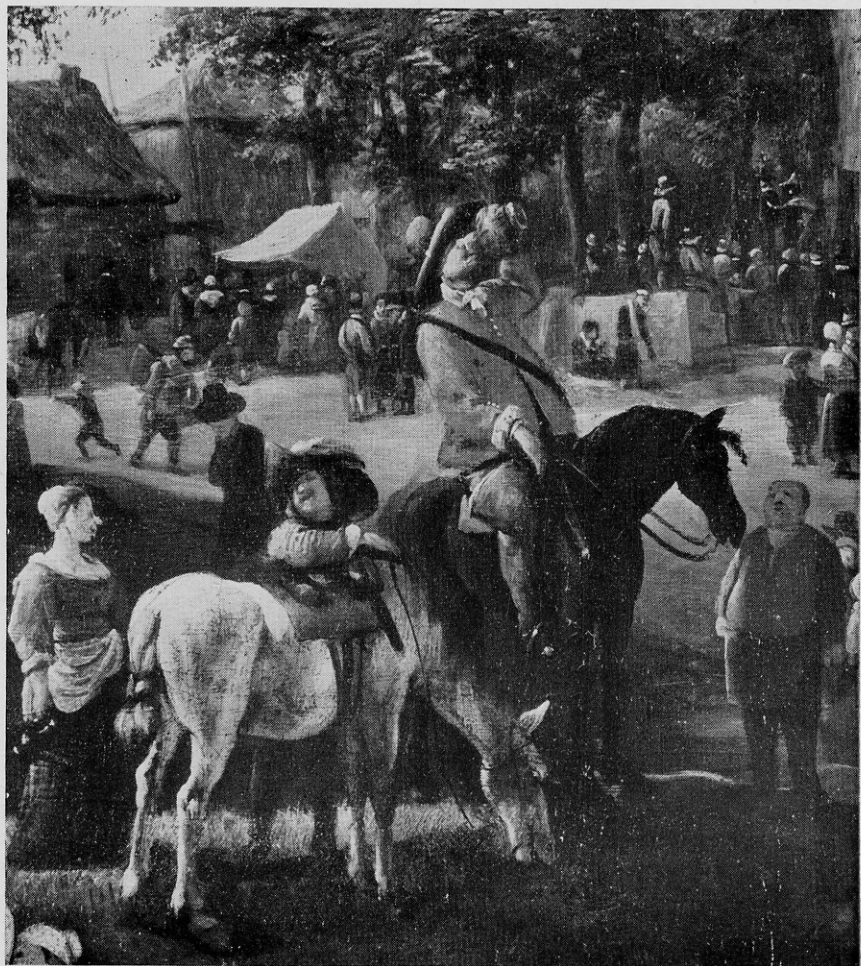


Bulletin of  
The Detroit Institute of Arts  
of the City of Detroit



THE FAIR AT OEGSTGEEST (DETAIL)  
BY JAN STEEN  
DUTCH, 1626-1679  
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. EDGAR B. WHITCOMB

## THE FAIR AT OEGSTGEEST BY JAN STEEN

While there can be no doubt that Frans Hals and Rembrandt are the leading artists of the first and second generations of the great epoch of Dutch art in the seventeenth century, it is not so easy to select one man as the most representative master of the third and last generation. The choice must fall on either Jan Vermeer or Jan Steen. Vermeer with his exclusive and subtle taste expresses a state of extraordinary refinement communicated only to a highly educated public, predicting in the sparseness of his production and paucity of his imagination the end of the great period. In Jan Steen's art, on the other hand, with the richness of its fantasy, with its fertility and exuberance, the stream of production is still gushing forward even at this late period with an unheard-of intensity. No greater contrast could be imagined than that between the art of these two masters, whose existence together proves that the mass of the people, as well as the limited number of sensitive art patrons, found expression of their ideals in a great master.

Since the eighteenth century Jan Steen has been the most popular painter in Holland. In America he has yet to find his place. There is no museum or private collection in which he is adequately represented, with the exception of the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia whose originator had the foresight to gather a remarkable series of outstanding works by the master. The Detroit Museum owned till recently only one late work by the artist which—while it shows exceptional color combinations—represents the artist in a wild and rough

mood in which he sometimes produced compositions not to everyone's taste. The acquisition of a fascinating and brilliant work of Jan Steen's early period, *The Fair at Oegstgeest*,<sup>1</sup> as a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb, is, therefore, most welcome.

Another reason makes this painting still more valuable to us. A museum collection should not only give an idea of the artistic expression of the great masters, but represent them in such a manner that the connecting links between the great epochs of art become visible. The newly acquired painting shows clearly the bridge which connects the sixteenth century of Pieter Bruegel, as represented in our *Wedding Dance*, with the art of Jan Steen who was the greatest exponent of a style of similar humor, optimism, and vitality in the seventeenth century.

We may conclude that Steen was fond of Bruegel's art in just the period when he executed our painting from the fact that among the earliest of his known paintings are two companion-pieces of the "meager and fat kitchen", the motif of which goes back to engravings by Pieter Bruegel. Besides these we encounter among Jan Steen's works so many Bruegel-like subjects, as marriage festivals, peasant brawls, alchemists, and themes of moral significance, that we cannot doubt that he was a great admirer of Bruegel's work. Surely he wanted to produce something on the order of the *Wedding Dance* when he composed a painting like our *Fair at Oegstgeest*, which expresses the same eternal and inexhaustible desire of hard-working people for a good time when they are free from the pressure of work.



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The difference of century and style as well as his own originality kept Jan Steen from creating an exact imitation. The achievements of the painters of the generations of Hals and Rembrandt, which lie between Bruegel and Steen, could not help but exercise their influence on our master. The mediaeval idea still prevailing in Bruegel's art which gave a preeminent position to man within the cosmos—so much so that figures fill the space in Bruegel's picture to the very top—had passed away in the intervening period. The figures in Steen's paintings are small in proportion to their surroundings; the horizon is low and the sky speaks as clear a language as the earth; the cosmos has overpowered man. Nevertheless, although man has been pushed out of the paradise of his self-centered position within the cosmos, he enjoys life by forgetting himself in the fun of gay company as much in the age of Steen as he did in Bruegel's time.

Two artists, one of Frans Hals', the other of Rembrandt's epoch transmitted this knowledge to the young Steen: first, Jan van Goyen, the landscape painter of The Hague who became his final teacher after he had studied with Nicholaes Knupfer in Utrecht and Adriaen van Ostade at Haarlem<sup>2</sup>, and secondly, Isack van Ostade, the younger brother of Adriaen and co-pupil of Jan Steen.

The influence of Van Goyen is very obvious in our painting in the canal scene to the left and in the treatment of the sky, which is so much in Van Goyen's manner that Dr. Martin's theory that the older artist occasionally painted the sky in his pupil's paintings becomes plausible. The influence of Isack van Ostade can be observed in the small proportions of the figures in comparison with the landscape, in the painting of certain details like the inn at the right and the tree branches cov-

ering wall and roof, and in the warm afternoon glow in which the landscape is immersed — a light effect which was transmitted to Isack van Ostade by the Amsterdam painters under Rembrandt's influence.

By these divergent influences and by the fact that the locality of the scene can be identified as Oegstgeest near Leiden (by means of the church, which is one of the few Romanesque churches left in Holland), we can date the painting about 1653. At this time Steen had just returned to his native town of Leiden from the neighboring city of The Hague where he had been studying with Van Goyen. His period of study with Adriaen van Ostade was several years earlier. The correctness of this date is further confirmed by a comparison with the first dated painting by Steen we know, the *Village Wedding* of 1653 in the Mannheimer Collection, Amsterdam.

The artist was at this time twenty-six years of age. He was born in 1626, was inscribed at the University in Leiden as a student in 1646, and became at the age of twenty-two one of the founders of the Lucas Guild of his city in 1648. In 1649 he went to The Hague where, in the autumn of that year, he married Van Goyen's daughter, Margaretha. He had already earned at this time a considerable reputation as is shown by the fact that as early as 1651 four of his paintings were sent to Sweden by Baron Wrangel and one appears to have been sold to the Austrian court in the same year. Steen stayed in The Hague until 1653 when he returned to Leiden and then—restless as he was to be at other periods of his life—moved the year following to Delft, where he acquired a brewery that occupied him only until 1657. He returned then to Leiden for four years and next moved for a period of ten years to Haarlem, where his wife died in 1669 after she had given

him five children. From 1671 until his death in 1679 he lived at Leiden in a small house which he inherited from his father. From 1672 he was an innkeeper. In 1673 he married again. By his second wife, who had been the widow of a bookseller, he had another son. He died at the age of fifty-three.

Like most artists of the third generation of the great epoch of Dutch painting, like Pieter de Hooch and Vermeer, like Jacob van Ruisdael and Hobbema, like Metsu and Frans van Mieris, Steen developed remarkably early and did his best work in his youth and his early middle age. He was born in an epoch which had been preceded by two generations of great masters and had reached an unusually high level of art and of appreciation. The young artists of Steen's generation had around them the example of excellent masters and could select among them the teachers most congenial. For

Steen as for other artists of his generation an astonishing technical ability, and easy production (more than 700 paintings by him are known), and a great adaptability are characteristic. There were very few contemporary masters who had not at one time or another some influence upon Jan Steen. That our picture belongs to his early period is therefore in its favor. Although the artist was to produce in the period directly following the one in which he executed our picture (1655-1662), works of greater concentration, of more careful construction, and of more subtle color harmonies, *The Fair at Oegstgeest* is not surpassed by any of his later works in the variety of types and amusing groups of figures, in the rhythmic movement of the composition, in the fine play of light, and in the charm of the landscape treatment and atmosphere.

W. R. VALENTINER

- 1 Accession Number: 39.673. Oil on canvas. Height: 28 inches; Width: 39 inches. Signed in lower right-hand corner. The painting only recently turned up in the Dutch art market and was not known to C. Hofstede de Groot. It is described (with incorrect dimensions) in his *Catalogue Raisonné*, London, 1908, Vol. I, p. 168, Steen, No. 644, after John Smith, *Catalogue Raisonné, Supplement*, London, 1842, p. 490, Steen, No. 46, and Westrheene, *Jan Steen*, The Hague, 1856, No. 281. It appeared in the Amsterdam Sale, July 25, 1804, No. 72; and again in the M. Udink Sale, Amsterdam, October 28, 1808, No. 57; it was owned by the London dealer, Niewenhuis, in 1833. In recent years it was in the collection of Mr. De Schieter van Lophen, Brussels, from whom it was acquired by the firm of D. Katz, Dieren. It has appeared in the following exhibitions: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, *Tentoonstelling Onde Kunst, Catalogue*, 1936, p. 38, No. 152, ill.; Rhode Island Museum, Providence, *Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century, Catalogue* by W. Stechow, 1938, No. 51, ill.; New York World's Fair, *Masterpieces of Art, Catalogue*, 1939, No. 361; Detroit Institute of Arts, *Masterpieces of Art from Foreign Collections, Catalogue*, 1939, No. 47.
- 2 In the literature on Jan Steen (Hofstede de Groot, Martin, Stechow, and others), there are mentioned as his teachers, in accordance with Houbraken, usually only Nicolaes Knupfer, whose influence has been proved by Hofstede de Groot in an article in *Art in America*, Vol. XVI (1927-28), pp. 249-253, and Jan van Goyen, but it has been pointed out quite correctly by Stechow that Steen's early works are closely related to Isack van Ostade. It seems therefore probable that the often unreliable Weyerman (*Levensbeskryvingen*, The Hague, 1729) was well informed when he says that Steen worked first with Knupfer, then with Adriaen van Ostade in Haarlem, then with Jan van Goyen. An early stay at Haarlem is also suggested by Bode who believes that Jacob de Wet had a considerable influence on Steen at Haarlem, besides Frans Hals and Isack van Ostade.

## AN ITALIAN BAROQUE PAINTING AT ALGER HOUSE

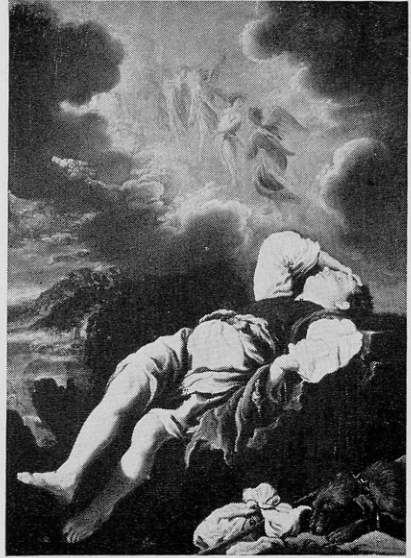
Perhaps no artist achieved more brilliant results in the handling of the dramatic and pictorial theme of "Jacob's Dream" than that rare and accomplished Italian painter of the Seicento, Domenico Feti. The fine

though small collection of Baroque painting and sculpture at Alger House has recently been notably increased by the addition of an example of Feti's work, a panel of moderate size, representing *Jacob's Dream*<sup>1</sup>, presented

to the Museum by the Founders Society.

In this composition, the principal figure of Jacob is brought into relief through theatrical foreshortening and plastic modeling. The lines of the figure carry the eye along a diagonal plane extending from left to right, and, although recumbent, the young man's body vibrates with a kind of quivering motion, conveyed by contrasts of light and shade, which is echoed above in the shaft of angels ascending and descending in a diagonal line from right to left on a stairway of light seen through opening curtains of troubled dark clouds. Together these two compositional lines form a wedge in the center of the panel and follow the most characteristic device of Baroque art for bringing emphasis upon movement by means of angular forms sweeping through the picture.

Domenico Feti is one of the three non-Venetian artists — the Genoese painter Bernardo Strozzi and the German Giovanni Lys being the others — who came to Venice in the seventeenth century and were responsible for reviving the art of that city from the dry formalism and mannerism into which it had degenerated after the deaths of Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto. It has often been thought that Feti was one of the artists who spread the influence of Caravaggio in northern Italy, but in his style, as various critics have pointed out<sup>2</sup>, it is difficult to detect any direct resemblance between the two artists, whose treatment of light and shade differs in so many respects. In his use of chiaroscuro Feti seems much more inclined to the pictorial and fanciful manner adopted by Tintoretto, Jacopo Bassano, El Greco, and others of Venetian training. The greyish tints, which suffuse the sky in *Jacob's Dream* and charge the shadows of the drapery, show the lingering style of Cigoli, the Florentine eclectic who



JACOB'S DREAM  
BY DOMENICO FETI  
ITALIAN (ROME, MANTUA, VENICE), 1589-1624  
GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

was Feti's master. In contrast to Feti's vibrant lighting effects, the dramatic spot-lighting of Caravaggio's compositions seems as cold as the figures are clear-cut.

Domenico Feti was born in Rome in 1589<sup>3</sup> and was apprenticed at an early age to the Tuscan painter Ludovico Cigoli, on whose recommendation he became a protégé of Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga. Feti moved to Mantua in 1613 or 1614 when his patron was created a duke and he remained there as Court-Painter until 1621, the year in which he was commissioned to go to Venice to buy paintings for the Grand Duke's collection. The atmosphere of Venice seems to have appealed to his restless temperament and encouraged his intense desires to paint, for he stayed in Venice until his death in 1624. Feti produced in that period some of his best works, among which are the small and beautiful easel-paintings which reveal his

natural genius far better than the labored compositions of more grandiose works commissioned of him in Rome and Mantua.

It is difficult, however, to arrange Feti's work in chronological order, for none of his paintings is dated. The general consensus is that the dozen small scenes, illustrating various parables and preserved in the Dresden Gallery, were executed in Mantua just prior to 1621, and that his paintings from the Duke of Mantua's collection, which was acquired by Charles I of England, belong to the same years. No doubt the version of *Jacob's Dream*, now in the Vienna Gallery, cited in the sale catalogue of the Duke of Buckingham's collection in 1648, was painted before Feti left for Venice and found its way to England along with other pictures from the Duke of Mantua's collection.

Feti was in the habit of painting several replicas of his most popular paintings, in accordance with prevailing custom<sup>4</sup>. Fiocco points out that these copies are invariably originals or replicas, although in the preceding centuries they would have been con-

sidered as copies in the literal sense of the word. Of *Jacob's Dream*, the original version seems to be the painting in Vienna<sup>5</sup>, referred to above, to which the slightly smaller replica at Alger House is closely allied. There are minor changes in the formation of the clouds and elsewhere, but the general composition and the principal figure remain unaltered. Judging from a photograph of the Viennese painting, the technique of our panel by comparison appears to be more fluid and the treatment of draperies and background less tight and conscious, but whether it was produced in Mantua or after 1621 in Venice is a matter of pure conjecture.

Upon the small easel-paintings as *Jacob's Dream* depends Feti's reputation as an artist of remarkable ability and poetic insight. To the small number of his works preserved in American collections, notably in the museums of New York, Worcester, Rochester, and Providence, *Jacob's Dream* in the Alger House collection adds a further opportunity to study and enjoy Feti's style.

JOHN S. NEWBERRY

1 Accession Number: 39.669. Oil on panel. Height: 23 1/2 inches. Width: 17 inches.

2 A. McComb, *The Baroque Painters of Italy*, Cambridge, 1934, pp. 78-80. G. Fiocco, *Venetian Painting of the Seicento and the Settecento*, New York, n. d., pp. 14-17.

3 Date given by G. Eaglione, *Vite de' Pittori*, Rome, 1642.

4 R. Oldenbourg, *Domenico Feti (Biblioteca d'Arte Illustrata)*, Rome, 1921, lists four versions of *Jacob's Dream*: one belonging to the Count of Shrewsbury at Alton Tower, another in the Bruckenthal Museum at Hermannstadt, a third in the Corsini Gallery in Rome, and a fourth in the Kunsthistorisches Staatsmuseum in Vienna.

5 For reproductions see Oldenbourg, *op. cit.*, pl. X. and M. Marangoni, "Domenico Feti", *Dedalo*, Vol. III (1922-23), p. 785.

## CALENDAR FOR MARCH

### EXHIBITIONS

Mar. 3 through Mar. 24: Laces and Embroideries from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Gift of the Czechoslovak Organizations of Detroit.

Mar. 31 through Apr. 28: Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting.

Alger House, Mar. 1 through Mar. 31: Paintings by Horatio Shaw, Michigan Pupil of Thomas Eakins.

Alger House, Mar. 29, 30, 31: Grosse Pointe Artists Association.

Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall of the Art Institute. Admission free.

- Mar. 12: *The Legend of St. Francis in Italian Art*, by Francis W. Robinson.  
 Mar. 19: *The Paintings of Sassetta*, by R. Langton Douglas, London, England  
 Mar. 26: *Pompeian Painting*, by Edward Capps, Jr., Oberlin College.  
 Apr. 2: *Athletics in Greek Life*, by Perry T. Rathbone.  
 Apr. 9: *Forerunners of the Arabian Nights Entertainment*, by Adèle C. Weibel.  
 Apr. 16: *The Great Sculptors of Pisa—Nicola and Giovanni Pisano*, by W. R. Valentiner.

#### GALLERY TALKS BY THE CURATORS

Thursday afternoons at 3:00 in the galleries, where chairs are provided. Admission free.

- Mar. 14: *The Making of Prints, III: Etchings*, by Isabel Weadock.  
 Mar. 21: *Georgian Art*, by Perry T. Rathbone.  
 Mar. 28: *The Museum's Tapestries*, by Adèle Coulin Weibel.  
 Apr. 4: *Gothic Sculpture of Northern Europe*, by Francis W. Robinson.  
 Apr. 11: *Italian Furniture, Bronzes, and Majolica*, by Perry T. Rathbone.

#### GREAT PERIODS OF ART

A series of lectures on the history of art as represented in the collections, given in the galleries by the museum instructors on Friday evenings at 8:00 and Saturday afternoons (in March) at 3. Chairs are provided. Admission free.

- Mar. 8 and 9: *English and American Painting of the Eighteenth Century*.  
 Mar. 15 and 16: *The Art of the Colonial House*.  
 Mar. 29 and 30: *The First Painters of the American Scene*.  
 Apr. 5: *Great Painters of the Nineteenth Century*.  
 Apr. 12: *Twentieth Century Sculpture*.

#### AN APPROACH TO ART

A new series of popular illustrated lectures by the museum instructors serving as an introduction to the arts, given in the lecture hall of the Museum, unless otherwise noted, on Sunday afternoons at 2:30. Admission free.

- Mar. 10: *Famous Portraits and Self Portraits of Artists*, by Marion Leland Heath.  
 Mar. 17: *Rubens and the Grand Manner*, by Joyce Black Gnau (in the Gallery).  
 Mar. 31: *Eight Masterpieces in our Museum*, by Marion Leland Heath.  
 Apr. 7: *The Grotesque in Art*, by Joyce Black Gnau.  
 Apr. 14: *The Current Exhibition of American Painting*, by John D. Morse (in the Gallery).

#### HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue at Kirby, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours are: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 1 to 5 and 7 to 10; Wednesday, 1 to 5; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Russell A. Alger House, 32 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe, is open free week days except Mondays from 1 to 5; Sundays 2 to 6. Telephones: Detroit Institute of Arts, COLUMBIA 0360; Alger House, TUXEDO 2-3888; World Adventure Series, TEMPLE 2-7676.