

# Bulletin

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Bruges  
in the  
Fifteenth  
Century

a detail from "The Virgin of the Rose Garden" by the Master of the St. Lucy Legend

Gift of the Founders Society, 1926

# THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

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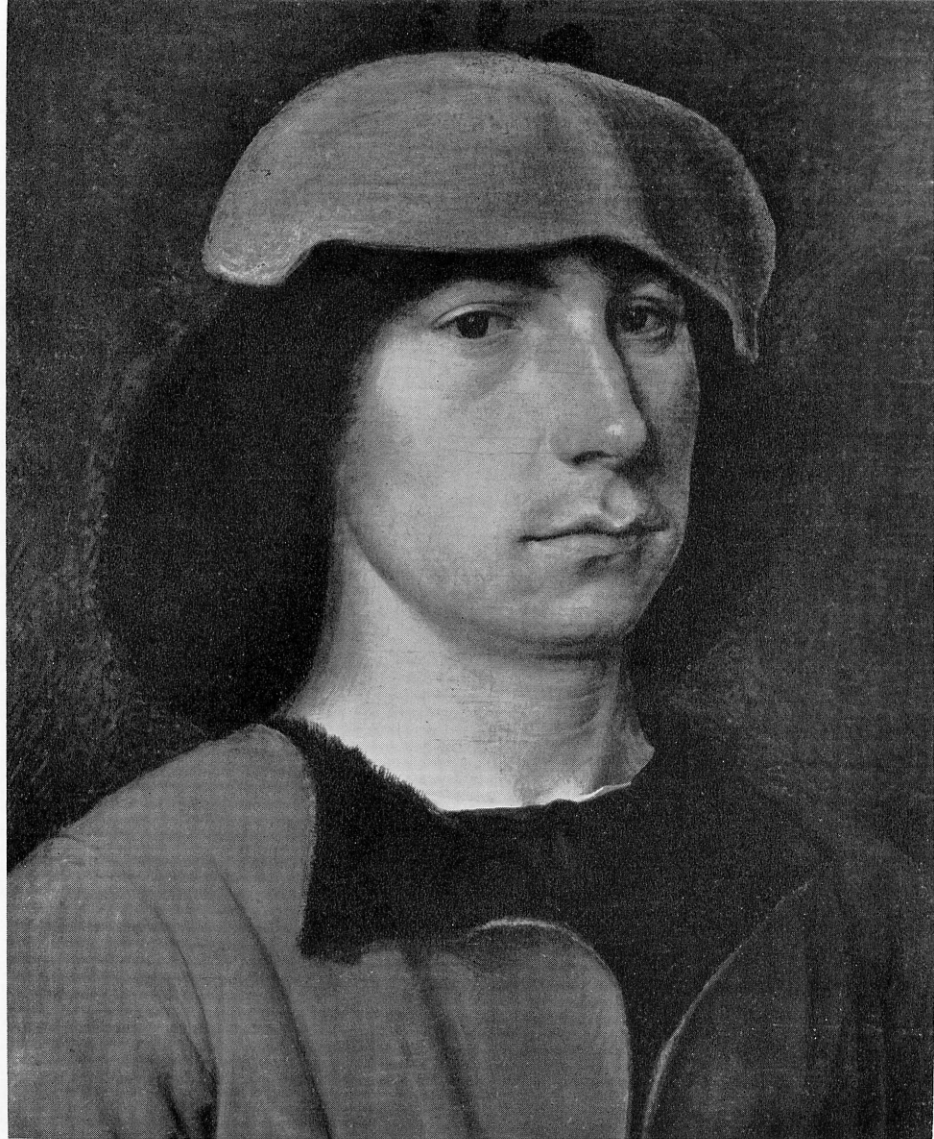
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PORTRAIT OF A MAN IN A RED HAT  
by MASTER MICHEL, Flemish (about 1469-1525)  
*Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1958*

PORTRAIT OF A MAN IN A RED HAT  
*by Master Michiel*

WHEN THE modern world was born, at the end of the middle ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, the great cities of the Netherlands, Bruges, Ghent, Brussels, were at the forefront of civilization and their highly skilled, cultured and complex life was diffused throughout the world, much as French culture was in the eighteenth century.

The commerce, the arts, the ideas of these cities formed a realm far more extensive than their small physical homeland. The scope of that invisible realm is hard for us to grasp.

Bruges is today a fine old city, whose medieval buildings delight us by their dignity and quiet; but it is difficult for us to conceive what it once was, when, like London or New York of today, it was the port of exchange for the goods, the money, the ideas of half the world. We see its walls and towers rising from green fields like a poetic vision in our picture of the *Virgin of the Rose Garden* (on cover). But it was no vision. Although in the middle of the fifteenth century its greatness was declining, Duke Philip the Good still called it, in 1450, the city "la plus renommée par tout le monde par le fait de marchandise qui se hante et des marchands qui y repairent." There were colonies of foreign merchants from the south, each organized as a nation with their own consuls, Venetians, Florentines, Pisans, Genoese, Luccans, Milanese, Catalans, Biscayans, Portuguese, Bretons. To northward its commerce included the whale fisheries and the furs of Russia brought from the great fair of Novgorod.

The culture of these cities was as widespread as the commerce. Its extent is illustrated by the career of Master Michiel, the first great international portrait painter of the Netherlands, whose cogent, famous little *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat* has just been given to our museum by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II.<sup>1</sup>

Master Michiel is a rediscovery of our own times and entered the history of art by way of the city of Burgos in Spain. It was a diptych found near Burgos, representing the *Madonna and Child* on one side and a *Knight of the Order of Calatrava* on the other (now divided between the museums of Berlin-Dahlem and Washington, D.C.) which was the subject of a brilliant hypothesis put forward by Max J. Friedländer in 1914, identifying this as the work of the Master Michiel who had become Court Painter to Queen Isabella in 1492. This "Mychel Flamenco" appears in the letters of the Emperor Maximilian and his daughter Margaret of Austria, published as early as 1839 by Le Glay. Subsequent archivists had published documents showing that he and another painter, Miguel Alemann, had entered the service of Queen Isabella, and had traced his services under Duke Philip the Fair, Margaret of Austria the famous regent of the Netherlands and art collector, and the young Emperor Charles V. Margaret of Austria was so fond of one of his pictures of the Madonna (perhaps portraying Margaret herself) reading a book while the Christ Child slept, that she called it her darling (*mignonne*). Charles V admired so greatly Michiel's work that when he abdicated as Emperor and retired to spend his last years in a Spanish monastery, four works of Master Michiel were among the personal effects which furnished his apartments at San Geronimo de Yuste.

Since Friedländer's essay in 1914, a number of students have put together a picture of Master Michiel's career in Spain, in the Netherlands, perhaps in England at the court of Henry VII, and in Denmark where he painted King Christian on the occasion of the King's engagement to Isabella, the daughter of Philip the Fair in 1514.<sup>2</sup>

There is disagreement still on details but the general outlines became clear of an artist somewhat like Van Dyck in a later epoch; a brilliant painter of religious subjects, but of outstanding qualities as a portrait painter. His portraits are among the finest of their time, vivid, candid, crisply elegant and reserved. We are well acquainted with those traits, since our museum was fortunate enough to acquire in 1940 one of his

religious works, *The Magdalen with the Features of Queen Catherine of Aragon* (below) holding a golden ointment box with the Tudor rose on its cover, a symbol of her two unhappy marriages to Arthur, Prince of Wales (d. 1502) and to his brother, Henry VIII of England.<sup>3</sup>

To this wandering but consistent career of Master Michiel a publication in Germany during the 1939 war made a strange and at first sight inconsistent addition. P. Johansen, writing in the Berlin yearbook of 1940,<sup>4</sup> published a series of documents from the archives of Tallinn (Reval) in Esthonia, showing that this court painter to the great princes of Spain and the Netherlands, whose first identified works were found in Burgos, was born at the other end of the civilized world, at Tallinn on the Gulf of Finland. He was the son of a painter named Clawes van der Suttow, who was his first teacher. After his father's death in 1482, the boy was sent by his guardians to study at Bruges under Memling (c. 1484-c. 1488). Then came the period of Master Michiel's life in Spain and the Netherlands (1492-1505). His mother had in the



CATHERINE OF ARAGON AS THE MAGDALEN

by MASTER MICHEL (Michel Sittow)

Flemish (about 1469-1525)

*Gift of the Founders Society, 1940*

meantime married a second time to a glass maker, Diderik van Katwijk, who took over the workshop of Clawes in Tallinn. The mother died in 1501. The stepfather journeyed to Brabant, where he found Master Michiel, and offered him a property settlement, which was refused. In 1506 Master Michiel returned to Tallinn, sued for his inheritance, received a partial settlement, married and settled down there until 1514. After a further journey to Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain, he returned to Tallinn about 1518 and spent the rest of his life in that city, where he died in 1525.

Tallinn was at this time a prosperous little city of perhaps six thousand people, which was the port of entry for the trade of the Netherlands and the Hanse towns into Russia and the fair at Novgorod. Its merchants and skilled artisans were Netherlanders, Germans and Swedes. Johansen, writing in Germany during the last war, exerted a great deal of ingenuity to provide a German origin for Michiel's family name, deriving it from Mecklenburg. Karl Justi, a great student of Spanish art in the past century, derived it from the former manor of Sithiu near St. Omer, in the southern, French-speaking portion of Flanders. The artist himself spelled his last name Sittow, but in his travels it suffered at least sixteen changes in the hands of foreign clerks, ranging from Sithium and Zittoz in Spain to Sitkow in Reval.

What seems clear is that his father's name, Clawes van der Suttow, is Netherlandish, as is the name of his stepfather, Diderik van Katwijk. In 1476, when the boy Michiel was seven, the Dominican monastery of Tallinn, in which his uncle Dominic was *lector theologiae*, needed reorganization. A noted Doctor Albertus Petri, vicar of the "congregatio Hollandie" came to Tallinn, bringing new monks to join the monastery. Those monks stayed on for a long period in the house of Clawes van der Suttow, while the monastery was put in order to receive them. Dr. Petri, a well-born Hollander, bought the furnishings and antependium of the altar in Bruges in 1481 and 1486; and in 1495 an altar, a work of the school of Memling. All the cultural connections of Michiel's family were thus with Bruges. It was as natural for his guardians to send the talented boy to study there under Memling as it would be for a boy in the American colony of Manila, or Mexico City, to return to the United States for his college. In Spain, the Spaniards at the court of Isabella called him Michiel the Fleming, while his fellow artist was known as Miguel the German: he must have considered himself Flemish, it seems obvious. That a painter could be active from the coast of Finland to Spain, while remaining within the framework of Flemish art, is an illustration of the immense diffusion of Flemish culture at the close of its golden century.

A final word about our portrait. This proud, strong, melancholy, introspective face, painted with so much insight and power, challenges one's curiosity. At one time, following Baldass's theory, which was then the only attempt to arrange Master Michiel's work in chronological order,<sup>5</sup> I believed this to be an early work, from his first years in Spain, and perhaps representing a Spaniard.<sup>6</sup> It seems no longer possible to believe in this date for the work. Master Michiel seems to have begun with a clear, firm, precise style, learned from Memling (of which the Detroit *Catherine of Aragon* is a beautiful example) and to have developed in his later years a softer and more atmospheric style. The portrait of *King Christian of Denmark* (dated in the background 1515) and the works done in Tallinn after 1518, which Johansen reproduces, prove this. *The Man in a Red Hat* belongs in my opinion to the middle period of

his career. The portrait was once given by Max J. Friedländer (*Die Altniederländische Malerei*, VII, 1930) to Jan Gossart. He later concurred with Dr. Valentiner and Hulin de Loo in the attribution to Master Michiel (*id.*, XIV, p. 112). The costume does not suggest a court portrait but someone of the citizen class. I cannot avoid raising the question, suggested by an intangible quality in the portrait: is it a self-portrait? No one can say. I must leave it to the reader to determine for himself whether this is the face of a man who could give up the position of court painter to the Emperor Charles V for the quiet life of a citizen-painter in far-away Tallinn.

E. P. RICHARDSON

<sup>1</sup> Cat. No. 1316. Panel. Height 6½ inches; width 5⅛ inches. Ex. coll.: Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haass. Acc. No. 58.383. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> This princess brought Burgundian manners and luxuries to Copenhagen. To please his young queen, the king brought a colony of Flemings to Denmark which grew fruits and vegetables for the royal table. The Danes do not seem to have resented this revolution in their medieval cuisine, for when they deposed King Christian, they invited the queen to remain as Regent for her children; she however followed her husband into exile.

<sup>3</sup> The same person appears in the Berlin *Madonna* and in a superbly elegant portrait in Vienna. Winkler's identification of her as Catherine of Aragon has been contested but still seems to me plausible.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Johansen: 'Meister Michel Sittow, Hofmaler der Koenigin Isabella von Kastilien und Buerger von Reval', *Jahrbuch der Preuss. Kunstm. (1940)*, Vol. LXI, p. 1 ff. This issue is rare and I am indebted to the library of Oberlin College for their courtesy in allowing me to use their copy.

<sup>5</sup> L. Baldass, *Burlington Magazine*, 1935, p. 77. M. Weinberger's chronology in the *Burlington Magazine*, 1948, pp. 247-253, seems even more radically unconvincing.

<sup>6</sup> *The Art Quarterly*, II, 1939, pp. 107-8.

## A "VANITAS" STILL-LIFE by Petrus Schotanus

THE INSTITUTE has recently acquired an example of the interesting genre of *Vanitas* still-life by Petrus Schotanus, a rare Dutch painter of the second half of the 17th Century.<sup>1</sup> Beyond a few bare references which perhaps place him in Leeuwarden in 1663/1664 and in Amsterdam in 1687, very little is known of him.<sup>2</sup> No more than a dozen works, mostly still-lives, have been identified. It has been suggested that he was an amateur, but most likely he was one of the hundreds of minor Dutch masters who worked in the 17th Century.

The theme of the death's-head was popular and widespread in Baroque art. This was due in part to the influence of the "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. In one of the passages it is suggested that the faithful meditate each day on their approaching death. It was soon found that a skull was an ideal object to aid the meditant in this pursuit, and the art of the Catholic Counter-reformation abounds in representations of saints so engaged.<sup>3</sup> The Institute owns a prime example of this version of the subject in its *St. Jerome* by the Spanish



STILL LIFE: "VANITAS"

by PETRUS SCHOTANUS, Dutch (active 2nd half of the 17th century)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Fleischman, 1959

painter Jusepe Ribera, and one finds even that kindest and most humanistic of saints, St. Francis of Assisi, in a similar attitude by El Greco.

In the Northern Protestant countries, however, the theme of meditation on death, or "Memento mori," had a long and independent tradition. It had been particularly popular in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> One need think only of the many versions of the *Dance of Death* and similar subjects, particularly the woodcut series by Holbein, to verify its popularity. In the 17th Century the most prevalent treatment of the theme was the *Vanitas* still-life and in Holland the examples are almost innumerable.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the work need not necessarily have a primary religious connotation. The idea that "All is folly," "Death triumphs over all," etc. — these and similar inscriptions are frequently found in the canvases — seems to have had a peculiar attraction for the Northern artist.

The notion that everybody dies might seem to us to be too obvious to require such repeated treatment. However, if we examine our canvas closely we find ideas presented which are central to Baroque style and to Baroque thinking. The globe, so prominent in the composition, would seem to give a universal implication to the theme. The laurel-wreath, of course, symbolizes "Fame" or "Glory," the books intellectual endeavor or earthly knowledge. These too shall fade—*Sic transit gloria mundi*. Of the two roses, however, one is overblown, the other but a bud. Thus, while death



is shown as inevitable for all living things, the emphasis is not on the morbid, that is, termination, but on transition.<sup>6</sup>

The momentary or transitory are the preferred aspects of life in the 17th Century. The almost universal interest of artists in movement and light effects illustrates this attitude in the very form of the works of art. The popularity of certain literary sources—for instance, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—carry the interest into subject-matter. The *Vanitas* still-life presents the idea of change or transition in perhaps its most graphic form.<sup>7</sup>

CURTIS G. COLEY

<sup>1</sup> Cat. No. 1297. Panel. Oval. Height 16¾ inches; width 22¾ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Fleischman, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> The basic information is given in Thieme-Becker, *Künstlerlexikon*, XXX (1936), p. 266, and in Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon*, Wien and Leipzig, II, 1910, pp. 583-584. See also Renkens, "Petrus Schotanus als Kerkschilder," *Kunsthistorisches Mededelingen* III, 1948, pp. 56-59, and W. Bernt, *Die niederländische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*, III, 1948, p. 742, who publishes another version of a "Vanitas."

<sup>3</sup> E. Mâle, *L'art religieux après le concile de Trente*, Paris, 1932, pp. 203-227.

<sup>4</sup> J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York, 1956, pp. 138-150.

<sup>5</sup> A. Pigler, *Barockthemen*, II, Budapest and Berlin, 1956, pp. 586-592, lists five pages of examples from 17th Century Holland, with scarcely a dozen examples from other countries.

<sup>6</sup> For a full treatment of the iconography of the "Vanitas" theme in general, see H. Rudolph, "Vanitas: Die Bedeutung mittelalterlicher und humanistischer Bildinhalte in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Festschrift Wilhelm Pinder*, Leipzig, 1928, pp. 405-433, especially pp. 420-428 for its appearance in still-life. See also M. J. Friedländer, *On Art and Connoisseurship*, London, 1943, pp. 132-133.

<sup>7</sup> After this note went to press we received a communication from Mr. Seymour Slive of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, who was able to identify one of the books on the table. The one on the right, lying open, shows the letters . . . SANNES, and an engraved portrait of a woman in an oval frame. Mr. Slive notes that the book follows the same format and probably bears the same title as a volume belonging to Mr. Philip Hofer on deposit at the Houghton Library at Harvard. It is called "Le Miroir des plus Belles Courtisannes de ce temps." There is no author cited, and there are at least two editions of the work known, of 1630 and 1631. It lists a number of the most famous of these ladies, together with some of their accomplishments. The book, of course, is altogether appropriate for inclusion in a "Vanitas" still life.

## Two Pieces of Ceramic

"WHEN A COLLECTOR enjoys a taste for art," said the great connoisseur Edmond de Goncourt, "that taste cannot possibly be limited only to paintings: a piece of porcelain, a textile, a *ciselure*, anything that is art, must of necessity appeal to him." Goncourt wrote this some eighty years ago, at a time when the distinction between the arts of decoration and the "fine" arts was far greater than it is now. Yet, even today, that distinction persists. But it is indeed fortunate for us at the Art Institute that there are still collectors like Edmond de Goncourt. Two pieces of majolica, the recent gift to our museum of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, and comparable in quality to the Rem-



COVERED BROTH-BOWL AND DISH  
Italian (Urbino), 3rd quarter of the 16th century  
*Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1959*

brandt *Woman Weeping* and the Tiepolo *Lady with a Lute* which these friendly collectors recently presented to Detroit, well illustrate this concept. Poles apart in spirit and execution, they have in common the whimsical quality of trifles, and also the familiar and restful charm of all great works of art.

The earlier of the two pieces is a broth-bowl set, such as were usually presented during the Italian Renaissance to young mothers at the birth of a child.<sup>1</sup> Remarkable for its intrinsic beauty, it is no less important for the history of Italian majolica on account of its completeness. As can be seen from our reproduction, the set is composed of three sections, the bowl itself (the *scodella*) on a high foot, a trencher used as a cover and fitting tightly to the mouth of the bowl (the *tagliera*), and finally, a deep and extremely graceful tray, which is almost never found in such groups: to live dangerously has ever been the fate of ceramics and, although bowls and *tagliere* are not uncommon, few trays have survived.

Such accouchement sets were made throughout the sixteenth century, with infinite variations, in most of the pottery centers of Italy. The present example dates probably from the third quarter of the century, and was executed in the last great *bottega* of the Renaissance, the Urbino factory in the duchy of that name. To date it more closely would be difficult; in the art of ceramics, once a center accepted a distinctive formula, it often kept it for several generations. In any case, the set is a significant example of the art of the Renaissance in its later, Manneristic flowering.

Like much majolica of the High Renaissance, the present set is lavishly covered with a complex painted decoration. Most characteristic of the Mannerist style are the wide borders of grotesques, and musical instruments outlined on the light cream background which one associates with the wares of Urbino, exquisitely luminous and ever so minutely crackled and iridescent. The various scenes inside and outside each of the three sections, perfect vehicles, as Bernard Rackham said of such wares, for an artist's skill as a painter, are logically enough all connected with the rather hazardous life of a new born baby — his first bath, his first meal, his first swaddling clothes. And for good measure the undersides of the tray and of the *tagliera* are ornamented with herculean cupids walking on clouds. The result of such elaborate delicacy might easily have been trite and mawkish. Even more easily it might have been gaudy and vulgar. But household objects of the Renaissance remain always works of art. The inflexibility of a medium which does not admit of retouching, the uncanny sense of measure of men living in a moral climate favorable to art, above all the innate taste of the Renaissance craftsmen, all these qualities make us forget, or rather make us admire, the exuberance of the Latin artist, so alien to our own present taste. And, as Reynolds said, "Could we teach taste and genius by rules, they would no longer be taste and genius."

The second piece of ceramic added to our collections, a large platter made in one of the Rouen factories probably in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, is a work of a different order. The Urbino set owes much of its beauty to the smooth delicacy of its painting, in which the craftsman succeeded in reflecting the greatness of the age of Raphael and Andrea del Sarto; it is as a series of subtle, everyday life vignettes closely related in their labored completeness and sophistication to the art of illumination that we think of it. The French platter, on the contrary, with the incisiveness of its design and its linear harmony, its extraordinary variety of texture, the



PLATTER (*plateau de table*) French (Rouen), 2nd quarter of the 18th century

*Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1959*

(A detail of this platter is reproduced on page 95)

functional simplicity of the severely rectangular shape, even its majestic size, is perhaps closer to what potters today strive most to attain in their art.

Beyond doubt the Rouen platter,<sup>2</sup> too heavy almost to carry, was made to be used as a *plateau de table*, a table top on which tea perhaps was served. I do not remember having seen such eighteenth century tables in American collections, although examples exist in some European collections, in Sweden, for example. In any case, such *plateaux* are rare and, in spite of their thickness, a characteristic of Rouen faïence, quite fragile. Most of the other characteristics of Rouen pottery are also present in the Detroit platter, in particular the unexpected harmonies of the chords of color, the pitted brick-red turning brown, the fresh, acid greens, the brilliance of the grayish glaze, transparent in places, the gorgeous dark mottled blue which gives coherence and solidity to the flowery border, and the lighter blues which are used for shadows and outlines, in the Delft style. Equally typical of Rouen pottery is the sturdy quality of the potting, vigorous and uncompromising, and in close harmony with the strength of the color scheme: Rouen was particularly famous in the eighteenth century for the

boldness of its large pieces, colossal busts of mythological heroes, celestial globes on huge pedestals and, not least among those works which deserve the highest respect (according to Arthur Lane in his *French Faience*) such plateaux as ours.

The scene represented on the platter was probably borrowed from an engraving in one of the many pattern books of the period, such as Edwards and Darly's *New Book of Chinese Designs Calculated to Improve the Present Taste . . .* (1754). It is a perfect example of *Lachinage*, the name given on the Continent to the craze for everything Chinese to which European decorative arts owed much of their impetus at the time of Louis XV and the first Georges, in England. Indeed, there is a close affinity between that century and the Far East: "eighteenth centuryness" as an English critic once said, seems to have been endemic in China, and no union of two artistic worlds has ever been so fruitful. What does the scene represent? It is hard to say. In a Chinese garden which reminds us of Charles Lamb's "world before perspective," a Mandarin and his wife are seated, receiving apparently a gift from a visitor. That the gift looks strangely like a mouse trap, that the table stands precariously on one leg, that a parasol hangs high without support, while four green and yellow dragons fly gracefully in the air, all that is immaterial. H. Sidgwick, when examining in Philosophy at Cambridge, said to a colleague: "I can see that this is nonsense . . . but it is the right kind of nonsense." Our Chinoiserie is the right kind of nonsense.

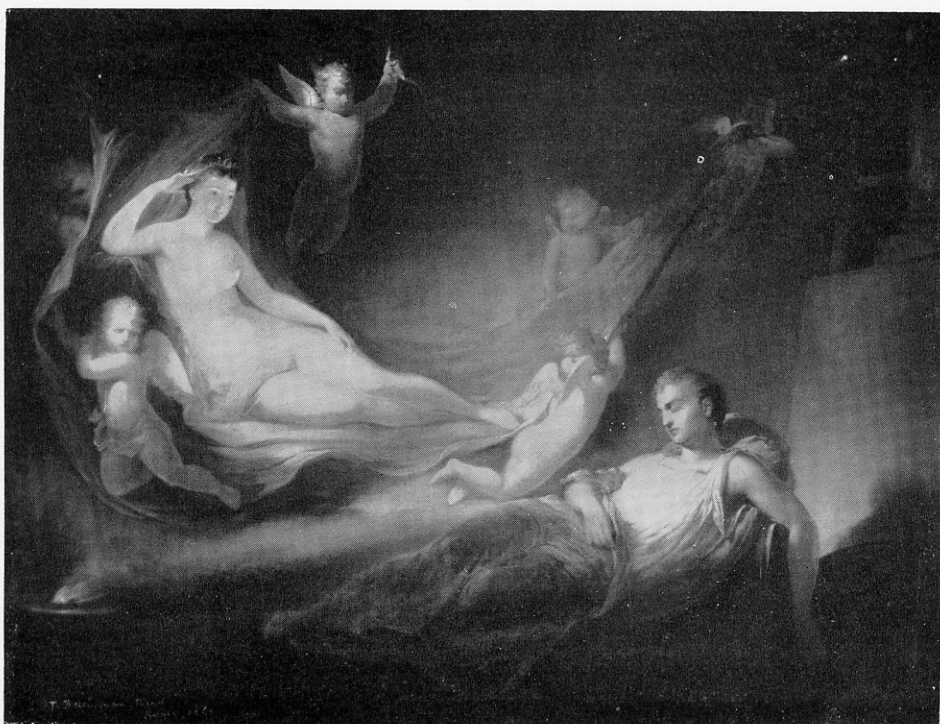
PAUL L. GRIGAUT

<sup>1</sup> Acc. No. 59.124. Cover: diam. 7 inches. Cup: height 4 inches. Bowl: diam 8½ inches. Ex-coll.: Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild, Vienna. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Acc. No. 59.5. Height 18¾ inches; width 24½ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II, 1959. For related example cf. *Catalogue* of the Thumin sale, Paris, 1936 (No. 39). It is possible that the Detroit piece was executed in the Guillibaud atelier. The quotation from H. Sidgwick will be found in Kelly's *Ruling Few*.

### *An American Painter's Dream*

THOMAS BUCHANAN READ, sculptor, actor, poet, painter, a protégé of Longfellow and, significantly, the first American friend of the English Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti, is today one of the most completely forgotten of nineteenth century American intellectuals. A prolific portrait and genre painter, who was admired by his friends for his poems, and a poet whose paintings were praised at the expense of his poems, Buchanan Read is, in the duality of his inspiration, a somewhat tragic figure, whose name today, if we think of it at all, we associate only with the Civil War poem *Sheridan's Ride*. Even when he was still alive the praise given him as a painter was often lukewarm. Tuckerman, one of the early art critics in this country, mentioned in his *Book of the Artist* (1867) that Read was "better known for his verses than his pictures, both of which are remarkable for a certain grace of conception and refinement of execution," which was no great tribute on the part of a writer who devoted ten pages of his book to Daniel Huntington, and the *Dictionary of American Biography*, after mentioning that Buchanan Read spent his restless life traveling from Chester County, Pennsylvania (where he was born in 1822) to Cincinnati, Boston, Düsseldorf,



THE PAINTER'S DREAM  
by THOMAS BUCHANAN READ  
American (1822-1872)

Gift of Mrs. Charles E. Feinberg, in honor of Mrs. Benjamin L. Lambert's 90th birthday, 1959

London, Rome, concludes that "his figure studies are in a style no longer admired." Yet it is with a great deal of pleasure that a short time ago our Museum received as a gift from Mr. Charles E. Feinberg, to celebrate the 90th anniversary of his friend Mrs. Lambert, one of Buchanan Read's smaller works, *The Painter's Dream*, executed in Rome the year Mrs. Lambert was born. In addition to its very real qualities of naïveté and of reticence—in a subject which does not lend itself to reticence and naïveté—*The Painter's Dream* is for us an important link between Washington Allston's *Flight of Florimell* and the works of later Romanticists such as Arthur B. Davies.

It is too often thought that American painting after Allston was entirely composed of landscapes, portraits and "Primitives," and little attention has been given to these "fanciful conceptions" (the phrase used by Tuckerman when discussing Buchanan Read's works) which are often in fact of equal interest. Thomas Cole's glowing and triumphant *Architect's Dream* in the Toledo Museum of Art, for instance, William Page's exquisitely somber *Cupid and Psyche* in the Fleischman collection and William Rimmer's Shakespearian flights of fancy, among countless others, introduce us to a fascinating world of half understood or unconscious aspirations of the American mind

in the middle of the nineteenth century, about which we know too little. Many of these works are nothing more than timid reveries; others are overambitious and belabored *grandes machines* such as were found in the Paris Salons. But the best of them are psychological and historical documents of a high order, in which may be detected the pathos of artists conscious of the existence of a greatness they will never achieve. Among these I would like to place Buchanan Read's *Painter's Dream*.

The subject of the Detroit "fanciful conception" is obvious. A young artist, dressed in a vaguely classical costume, is lying asleep in his studio, a huge blank canvas behind his couch. Floating over him is Venus with her retinue of cupids, resplendent in the darkness and ready to bring the Byronic hero inspiration and love. *The Painter's Dream* is one of those paintings, so unfashionable today, in which subject matter plays the most important part. Both in composition and execution it is full of reminiscences. The painter's figure was based in all probability on some Baroque *Jacob's Dream* in an obscure Roman church, while this American Venus must have had her prototype on the ceiling of a Roman palazzo. The limited color scheme is that of provincial Italian eighteenth century painters, with its warm browns, its muted reds and soft greens and yellows. Yet the painting has great charm in its Puritanical restraint and obvious sincerity. It is keepsake art, but it is also something more. Looking at *The Painter's Dream* with sympathy (and did not Coleridge say that one should never judge a work of art by its defects?) one can but admire the clarity of the composition, the directness of approach when treating a difficult theme, above all the humility and anxiety of the artist who realizes that he does not have very much to say but who wants to say it as well as he is able.

At the time when Buchanan Read was working on the Detroit painting Burne-Jones described what to him was the ideal painting: "By a picture," he said, "I mean a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, that never will be, a light better than the light that ever shone in a land no one can define or remember, only desire." There is no better description of our *Painter's Dream*.

PAUL L. GRIGAUT

Cat. No. 1332. Canvas. Height 29¾ inches; width 38½ inches. Signed T. Buchanan Read/Rome 1869. Ex-Coll.: Borneman, Philadelphia. Gift of Charles E. Feinberg in honor of Mrs. Benjamin L. Lambert's 90th birthday, 1959. The title given to the painting is tentative.

## A Contemporary American Collage

THE IMPRESSIONIST PAINTERS did not invent the problem of light in painting, but their use of light was the basis for a radical change in pictorial effects. In their canvases light was not used to focus an area, to heighten a dramatic mood, or to reveal a form, but was woven through the whole fabric of their pictures. Formal structures were diffused in the over-all illumination and the surfaces of their paintings became tapestries of dappled light and shade. This was troublesome, we recall, even to some



THE DWELLER  
by CONRAD MARCA-RELLI  
American contemporary  
*Gift of The Friends of Modern Art, 1959*



of the Impressionists' contemporaries who felt that this diffusion of form and dispersal of emphasis were weakening moves. However, in every succeeding generation of painters there have been efforts to preserve surfaces that are active and scintillating to an equal degree over their whole area and, at the same time, are capable of supporting some solidity of structure.

In this sense, Conrad Marca-Relli descends directly from the Impressionist line. During a period of work in Mexico, about 1953, he was first moved by the quality of light as he saw it splashed on adobe walls. Before this time he had worked, entirely in oil, in a diffuse surrealist style, slightly suggestive of Miró.

Since 1953, Marca-Relli has developed the technique of collage into a substantial medium which he has often used with great delicacy and restraint; just as often, he has made compositions of almost massive weight and solidity. These compositions, whether subtle or solid, have been based on the human figure. With this beginning the paintings have progressed through a series of adjustments in which portions of the figure and its surrounding spaces have been intermingled, interlocked and overlapped. The pieces of canvas, of which the collage is made, may be thought of as patches of light or shadow, but Marca-Relli has transposed them from the world of air and atmosphere to one that is solidly composed of fabric and paint.

In this transposition the artist has not worked with any intent to do violence to the figure but simply to integrate and diffuse its surfaces with those of the background. As he works, his concern is not at all with the facts of either figure or light but with the arrangement of the entire painting area, so that there is a continual interplay of values and shapes moving over the panel. As the artist says, the greatest danger is that the painting will die of this dismemberment, that it will work out its activity or lose it completely in the dispersal of form in space.

*The Dweller*<sup>1</sup> was painted in 1957, while the artist was working for a time in Rome. The figure is not so clearly discernible as it is in some of his more subtly wrought compositions. The integration here is boldly accomplished, and the dweller remains only as an essence in the canvas.

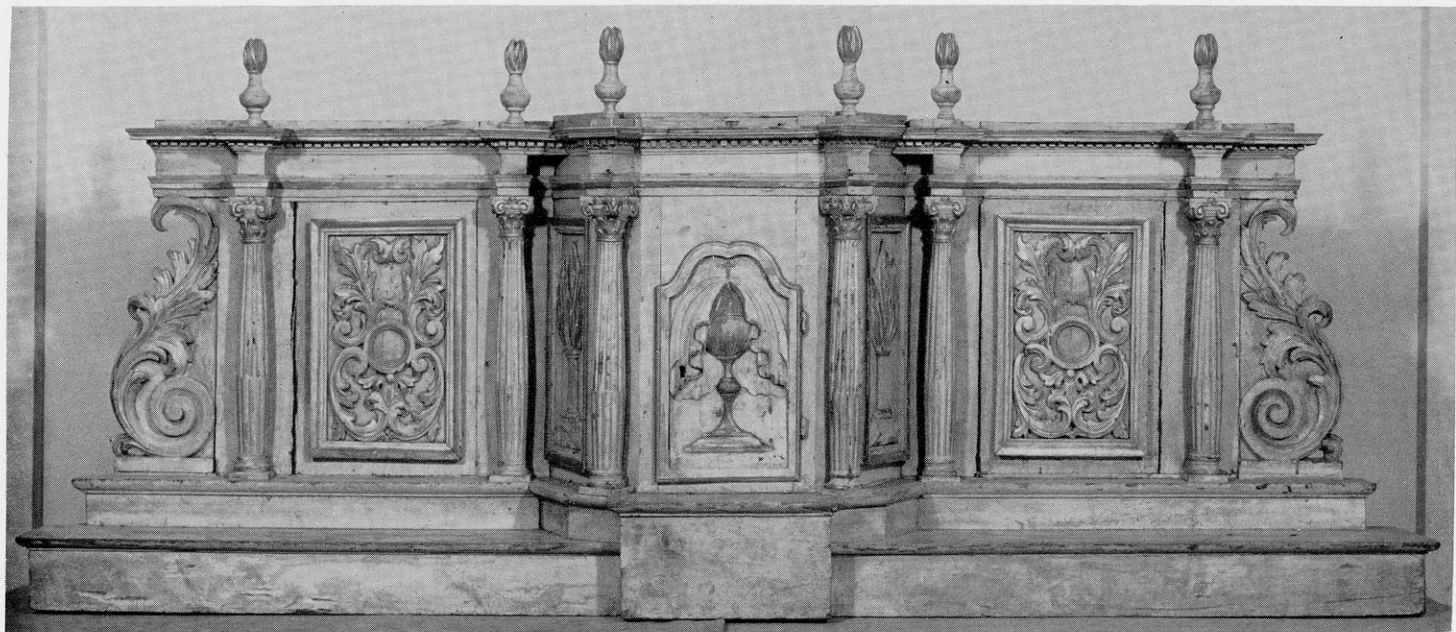
*The Dweller* is a gift of the Friends of Modern Art, whose recent gifts include a bronze *Seated Bather*<sup>2</sup> by Jacques Lipschitz, from his Cubist period (1917), and a painting by the admired Italian contemporary Renato Birilli, *Canto Popolare Fiammingo No. 1*.<sup>3</sup> This latter is one of a series of canvases that Birilli painted in Antwerp based on themes from Flemish folk songs.

A. F. PAGE

<sup>1</sup> Cat. No. 1321. Oil and collage on canvas. Height 59 inches; width 49 inches. *Gift of the Friends of Modern Art, 1959.*

<sup>2</sup> Acc. No. 59.114. Bronze. Height 28 inches. *Gift of the Friends of Modern Art, 1959.*

<sup>3</sup> Cat. No. 1317. Oil on canvas. Height 58 inches; width 35½ inches. *Gift of the Friends of Modern Art, 1959.*



*A pine retable, painted white and gilded, apparently carved by Jean Valin in 1738 for the altar of the church in Cap Santé, Quebec. Valin was a Quebec sculptor and woodcarver active in the first half of the 18th century. Another retable, very much like our own and made by Valin in 1735 for the Church of Saint Augustin of Portneuf, was recently added to the collection of the Musée de la Province, Quebec. Our retable, now installed in the French Canadian galleries on the ground floor, helps preserve some sense of the fast disappearing church art of old Quebec, an art which also graced the earliest church in Detroit, the French parish church of St. Ann.*

Acc. No. 58.180. Height (with finials) 36 inches; width 7 feet 3 inches. Depth 15 inches.

*Gift of the Founders Society, The Director's Fund, 1958.*



*Detail of Rouen platter illustrated on page 88*

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