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Jan Van Dalen
Bacchus, c. 1645

JAN VAN DALEM
(Brussels, before 1610 – after 1662)

BACCHUS, c. 1645

Oil on canvas
72 × 61 cm.; 28 1/3 x 24 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Belgium.

Literature

A. Crispo, “Il Maestro della morte di Didone alias Jan van Dalen. Un artista italianizzante nei Paesi Bassi del Seicento”, *Parma per l'Arte*, 2018, p. 266, fig. 6.

Little known today, Jan van Dalem is considered one of the best kept secrets of 17th century Flemish painting. Together with very different painters such as Gérard Douffet, Jan Miel and Michael Sweerts, he managed to stay independent from the overwhelming influence Rubens had on monumental figure painting during the 17th century and beyond. Today about a dozen paintings can be firmly attributed to Van Dalem and therefore this newly discovered Bacchus is a significant and important addition to the small body of work by the master.

Jan van Dalem had a strong penchant for the subject of the drunken Bacchus. He gave the deity a mischievous and challenging expression which appears to invite the viewer to enjoy a glass of wine with him. Arguably his best-known painting is an unsigned Bacchus preserved in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (Fig 1).

The Florentine painting, which measures 59 x 48 cm, shows the head of Bacchus close to the picture surface, his head askew and no glass of wine included in the composition. A latter rendition of the subject, showing a Bacchus holding a bottle, measuring 76 x 67 cm, is preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (Fig. 2).

The present painting is stylistically closely related to another Bacchus by Van Dalem in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Fig. 3).

The Vienna picture, measuring 68 x 59 cm, is signed and dated J.v.d. F 1648. It shares many stylistic characteristics with the present painting and therefore there can be no room for doubt that they are painted by the very same hand. Very typical indeed is the way the hair, the ivy around the head and the complexion of the head and naked shoulder of the figure is rendered in both paintings. Moreover, the glass of wine in the right hand is identical in both works. The Vienna painting is executed slightly more polished, and it seems most likely it post-dates the present Bacchus. A date during the early 1640's is certainly feasible for the newly discovered work.

Several paintings by Van Dalem can be found in 17th century inventories. The Vienna Bacchus was already during the lifetime of the painter recorded in the collection of Leopold Wilhelm. In 1682 the Antwerp banker, jeweller and art dealer Diego Duarte owed four paintings by the master. One is listed as 'Een droncken Bacchus van Van Dalem' (G. Dogaer, 'De inventaris der schilderijen van Diego Duarte', Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp 1971, pp. 195-221, no. 53). Unfortunately, it is impossible to say which of the extant versions with the Bacchus subject by Van Dalem was owned by the banker.

Jan van Dalem was, in all likelihood, the son of the eponymous Brussels goldsmith and born before 1610 He had several namesakes (Van Dealen, Van Daele, Van Dael), which make establishing his biography a difficult task. Facts about his life are still

confused with those by similar named masters. It has turned out that he is not identical with the Jan van Dalem, who was registered as a pupil of David de Middelaer in 1632. In fact, he was a pupil of a certain Jacques Fyderbe in Brussels in 1621. Ten years later, in 1631, he was present in Rome and from that date on he signed his paintings 'J. van Dalem fecit in Roma. Two genre scenes formerly in the collection of the Princes of Liechtenstein are signed this way. At this time Jan van Dalem was associated in Rome with the influential painter from Haarlem, Pieter van Laer, called Bamboccio. The work of Caravaggio and his followers had a more lasting impact on his work during the following decades. Especially, the paintings by Valetin de Boulogne must have made a powerful impression on Van Dalem. A large, multi-figured, painting from the 1640's representing the *Four ages of Man* shows the Valetin influence very strongly (Fig. 4 & Fig 5).

However, Van Dalem's different renderings of Bacchus are stylistically independent from the work of Caravaggio and his circle. These are highly original works and the newly discovered painting is an important addition to Flemish 17th century figure painting.

Luuk Pijl

Fig. 1. Jan van Dalem, *Bacchus*, oil on canvas. Florence, Palazzo Pitti.

Fig. 2. Jan van Dalem, *Laughing Bacchus*, oil on Canvas. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts.

Fig. 3 Jan van Dalem, *Bacchus,* oil on Canvas. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Fig. 4. Valentin de Boulogne, *The Four Ages of Men*, c. 1627-1629, oil on canvas. London, The National Gallery.

Fig. 5. Jan van Dalem, *The Four Ages of Men*, c. 1640, oil on canvas.
Private collection.

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