

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



HANS ROTTENHAMMER

(Munich 1564-1625 Augsburg)

A BACCHANAL

oil on copper

49.7 x 71.7 cm; 19 1/2 x 28 1/4 in.

Provenance

F. Hall collection, n.6 (according to an inscription on the reverse of the copper and frame);
Private collection, England, since at least 1926, and by descent;
Sale, Christie's London, 7 July 2023, lot 105 (as Hans Rottenhammer and Studio).

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

We are grateful to Dr. Luuk Pijl for endorsing the attribution of this painting fully to Hans Rottenhammer, following its restoration after the Christie's sale. We also thank him for his assistance with the cataloguing of the painting.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a select group of renowned artists exhibited a fascination with mythological themes, including the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the feasts of the Gods, and Bacchanals. Esteemed painters like Bartholomeus Spranger (1546-1611), Cornelis van Haarlem (1562-1638), Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638), Hendrick van Balen (1575-1632), and Hans Rottenhammer (1564-1625) frequently chose these subjects for their artworks, across various mediums. This choice allowed them to showcase their exceptional skill in creating intricate compositions teeming with figures in various states of undress.

The painting in question, a captivating composition by Hans Rottenhammer, places Bacchus, the god of wine, at its heart. Bacchus is depicted holding a bunch of grapes, clearly inebriated, supported by two revellers. To his right, a lavish spread of food is laid out on a large table, set against the backdrop of an expansive landscape. This scene, adorned with magnificent Roman ruins on one side and a graceful temple in the distance, perfectly encapsulates the essence of a Bacchanal.

Rottenhammer, alongside Paul Bril (1554-1626) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), was among the pioneers in the late sixteenth century to frequently utilise copper as a painting surface. While earlier artists like Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547) and Parmigianino (1503-1540) occasionally painted on copper, it was the Northern painters working in Italy who popularised this technique in the 1590s. The stable and smooth surface of copper allowed them to achieve extraordinary and unparalleled effects in their paintings. Rottenhammer's reputation for working on copper in a small format was widespread during his lifetime, Rudolf II being one of the most prized collectors of such works (see below).

The present painting's composition is mirrored in another work, which sold at Christie's on 30 April 2010, lot 21 (**Fig. 1**). Although direct comparison is challenging, the painterly quality of both pieces suggests they may have been created concurrently - a practice not uncommon at the time to maximise productivity. Stylistic analysis dates both works to the period shortly after 1600, during Rottenhammer's productive years in Venice. Additionally, another version of this composition, larger (146.1 x 206.7cm) and on canvas, sold at Sotheby's on 1 February 2018, lot 41 (**Fig. 2**).

Rottenhammer was born in Munich in 1564 and trained under Hans Donauer the Elder (c.1521-1596) until 1588. He spent time in Rome around 1593 and lived in Venice from 1595 to 1606, before returning to Germany to settle in Augsburg, where he died in 1625. While in Venice, he began experimenting with small-scale copper plates, blending Northern and Italian influences in his landscapes and mythological scenes. His work demonstrates a deep admiration for the grandiose compositions of Tintoretto (1518-1594) and Veronese (1528-1588). In Rome, he encountered Bril, the era's leading landscape artist.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

After moving to Venice, Rottenhammer occasionally painted figures on copper plates, sending unfinished works to Rome for Bril to complete. This collaborative approach also extended to works with Jan Brueghel the Elder. In 1600, Rottenhammer was commissioned to create a *Feast of the Gods* for Emperor Rudolph II, now housed in the Hermitage (**Fig. 3**). Following his return to Germany, he undertook significant projects, including altarpieces and decorative schemes for palaces, such as the Munich Residenz and the Goldener Saal in Schloss Bückeborg.¹

¹ For a comprehensive understanding of Hans Rottenhammer's contributions as a painter and draughtsman, the exhibition catalogue *Hans Rottenhammer: Begehrt – vergessen – neu entdeckt* by Heiner Borggrete and others, presented at the Weserrenaissance-Museum Schloss Brake and the National Gallery in Prague in 2008/2009, offers an excellent overview. This exhibition and Rottenhammer's oeuvre were reviewed in *The Burlington Magazine* in 2008.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 1. Hans Rottenhammer, *The Banquet of the Gods*, oil on copper, 50.8 x 71.2.
Sold at Christie's, 30 April 2010, lot 21

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 2. Hans Rottenhammer, *Feast of the Gods*, oil on canvas, 146.1 x 206.7cm.
Sold at Sotheby's, 1 February 2018, lot 4.

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 3. Hans Rottenhammer, *Feast of the Gods (The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis)*, oil on copper, 34 x 45cm. Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum.