

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



ADRIAEN VAN OSTADE

(Haarlem 1610 - 1685)

*PEASANTS PLAYING CARDS*

Oil on panel

24 x 18 cm; 9 1/2 x 7 1/8 in.

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Provenance

Private collection, France.

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Likely trained in the workshop of Frans Hals in Haarlem, where he worked alongside Adriaen Brouwer, Adriaen van Ostade (1610–1685) quickly became Holland's leading painter of peasant and 'low-life' genre. Early in his career, he portrayed raucous scenes of rural debauchery, marked by exaggerated caricatures and the use of dramatic chiaroscuro influenced by Rembrandt. Over time, his work evolved towards quieter, more refined depictions of peasant life, characterised by more carefully structured spaces, muted earth tones, and warm, intimate lighting. He set his compositions within dimly lit interiors of inns or homes, filling them with lively yet unidealized figures, surrounded by simple furnishings and a sense of poverty, with bare and smoke-stained walls. His subjects ranged from tavern brawls and village fairs or *kermis* to family life and rural trades. A remarkably prolific artist, Van Ostade produced over 800 known paintings, around 50 etchings, and numerous drawings. He was active in Haarlem's Saint Luke's Guild and influenced Dutch genre painters, including his younger brother Isack (1621–1649), Cornelis Pietersz Bega (1631/32 - 1664) and Jan Steen (c. 1626 - 1679).

In what appears to be a barn from its bare and rudimentary architecture, three card players sit around a bare wooden table - similar interiors often recurs in van Ostade's works (Fig. 1-2). The men's mended clothes with muted tones suggest their low social status. Emerging from the shadows behind, one of them prepares to make his move, while his opponent to the left gives him a satisfied grin, confident in his play. A fourth figure, standing and holding a pipe, rests his elbow on a chair and looks at them with amusement. The scene is entirely lit by an opening on the left, almost theatrically isolating the four characters and their playful interactions. Adriaen van Ostade portrayed card players in several other works spanning his entire career, thereby illustrating one of the principal forms of entertainment and recreation of the period, together with skittle and backgammon (Fig. 3-5). Based on stylistic and thematic similarities, the present oil on panel can be roughly dated to the 1630s (Fig. 6-7).

The popularity of genre paintings in seventeenth-century Holland was due to their capacity to convey moral lessons on manners and lifestyle to middle-class families. However, they were also regarded as a means of providing comic relief within a more serious art collection.

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Fig. 1. Adriaen van Ostade, *Drinking and smoking peasants*, oil on panel.  
Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.

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Fig. 2. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Dancing Couple*, 1650, oil on panel.  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



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Fig. 3. Adriaen van Ostade, *Card-Playing Peasants*, 1655, oil on canvas.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

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Fig. 4. Adriaen van Ostade, *Tavern Scene*, early 1660s, oil on panel.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington.

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Fig. 5. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Interior of an Inn with Peasants Playing Cards*, 1674, oil on panel. National Trust, Ascott.



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Fig. 6. Adriaen van Ostade, *Peasants in a tavern*, 1630s, oil on panel.  
Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.

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Fig. 7. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Sense of Taste*, 1635, oil on panel.  
The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.