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Slaughtered Pig

Attributed to Caspar Netscher
(Prague or Heidelberg ca. 1639 – 1684 The Hague)

ca. 1660–62
oil on panel
36.7 x 30 cm
CN-104

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Seventeenth-century Netherlandish images of slaughtered oxen and pigs have their roots in medieval depictions of the labors of the months, specifically November, the peak slaughtering season. The theme was given new life in the mid-sixteenth century through the works of the Flemish painters Pieter Aertsen (1508–75) and Joachim Beuckelaer (ca. 1533–ca. 1574), who incorporated slaughtered and disemboweled animals in their vivid renderings of abundantly supplied market stalls, and also explored the theme as an independent motif.[1] The earliest instances of the motif in the Northern Netherlands come only in the seventeenth century, possibly introduced by immigrants from the south. During the early 1640s, the theme of the slaughtered animal—split, splayed, and suspended from the rungs of a wooden ladder—was taken up by (among others) Adriaen (1610–85) and Isack (1621–49) van Ostade, who typically situated the event in the dark and cavernous interior of a barn, stable, or kitchen.[2] A number of artists in Rembrandt's orbit—Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), Barent Fabritius (1624–73) **(fig 1)**, Nicolaes Maes (1634–93), and Jan Victors (1619–after 1676)—treated the subject during the 1640s and 1650s, as, of course, did Rembrandt himself, most famously in his *Slaughtered Ox* of 1655 in the Musée du Louvre **(fig 2)**.[3] In 1666, even the stylish Amsterdam portrait painter Bartolomeus van der Helst (1613–70) featured the carcass of a pig, flanked by a vegetable seller and a group of children, suspended before a view of Amsterdam's Nieuwmarkt.[4] In 1668, Van der Helst's painting was the inspiration for Michiel van Musscher's *The Haarlemmerdijk with a Pig on a Stepladder*;[5] interestingly, these last paintings return the theme to the urban market context developed by Aertsen and Beuckelaer more than a century before.

For obvious reasons, in Dutch genre paintings the motif of the slaughtered ox or pig is usually considered as a vanitas allegory.[6] Most seventeenth-century (and earlier) depictions include one or more children, who inflate the animal's bladder for use as a toy. This motif is a charmingly mundane manifestation of *Homo bulla*, which likens the fragility of human life to a delicate soap bubble. A print in a book of emblems published in 1712 shows children playing with an inflated pig's bladder, accompanied by a verse that begins: "How hard you blow, o child of the world! You catch nothing but wind. The world is nothing more than a bladder filled with air" **(fig 3)**.[7] The slaughtered pig could also represent avarice: folk tradition equated pigs gorging themselves with the behavior of misers; only after death was their usefulness revealed (in the form of ample food from the former or a substantial inheritance via the latter).[8]

The present painting is simply composed, with the spread and eviscerated carcass displayed frontally at the center and its severed head resting in a shallow wooden tub on a bench to the left. Most of the organs have been removed from the body, except

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Barent Fabritius, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1665, oil on canvas, 101 x 79.5 cm, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. 1214, photo: Studio Tromp, Rotterdam



Fig 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Slaughtered Ox*, 1655, oil on panel, 95.5 x 68.8 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. MI 169, Photo: Gerard Blot, ©RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

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for the dark kidneys and the anus. Peering out from behind the carcass is a young boy who blows air through a straw into the pig's bladder.

Earlier literature describes *The Slaughtered Pig* as being signed and dated either 1660 or 1662,[9] but no inscriptions are now visible on the painting.[10] Although the rustic subject matter aligns with Caspar Netscher's early depictions of barn and kitchen scenes—compare for example, *Chaff Cutter with Woman and Child* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1659; or *Knife Grinder* in Turin **(fig 4)**, dated 1662[11]—the relatively broad and imprecise painting style is atypical for the artist. Still, the productions of Netscher's early career (from the mid-1650s to about 1662) were highly variable, exploring a range of scale and technique and with evidently sophisticated works sometimes predating those less ambitious in design or execution.[12] Unless or until a more viable alternative can be presented, the current attribution of the picture to Netscher can reasonably be maintained.

- Marjorie E. Wieseman, 2017


MIDDEN EN EINDE. 47
De BLAAS.
Hoe sterk gy blaast, ô werelds kind!
Gy vangt doch anders niet als wind.

Wat is de Wereld, die het ziet?
Een Blaas vol wind en anders niet:
Laat daar 't onweetend Kind meé speelen:
Maar dat het wys, en gryp verstand,
Geen voddery houd' aan de hand,
Om in het kinderspel te deelen.

Jon

Fig 3. Jan Luiken, "De Blaas," from *Des menschen begin, midden en einde* (Amsterdam 1712), page 46, © 2004, DBNL



Fig 4. Caspar Netscher, *The Knife Grinder*, 1662, oil on panel, 43 x 34 cm, Galleria Sabauda, Turin, inv. 67, © 2015, photo Scala, Florence, courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali

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Endnotes

1. Joachim Beuckelaer, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1563, oil on panel, 114 x 83 cm, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, inv. no. WRM 2324.
2. Among many other examples, see: Adriaen van Ostade, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1643, oil on panel, 61 x 49 cm, Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt, inv. 1153; and Isack van Ostade, *Peasant Shed with a Slaughtered Pig*, ca. 1642–43, oil on panel, 48.3 x 39.8 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, inv. OS I-614. Other artists who depicted the theme include Egbert van der Poel, Hubert van Ravesteyn, and Renier Covijn.
3. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1646, oil on panel, 47.4 x 38.3 cm, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, inv. 37.167; Barent Fabritius, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1656, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 65.1 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. 819B; Barent Fabritius, *Slaughtered Pig*, 1665, oil on canvas, 101 x 79.5 cm, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. 1214; Nicolaes Maes, *Slaughtered Pig*, ca. 1655, oil on canvas, formerly 101.6 x 78.7 cm, private collection (painting has subsequently been cut, eliminating the carcass of the animal); Jan Victors, *Slaughtering the Ox*, 1647, oil on panel, 85 x 71 cm, private collection; Jan Victors, *The Swine Butcher,* 1648, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 99.5 cm, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, inv. SA 8341; and Rembrandt van Rijn, *Slaughtered Ox,* 1655, oil on panel, 93.5 x 68.8 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. M. I. 169. See also Jacques Foucart, *Les peintures de Rembrandt au Louvre* (Paris, 1982), 66–71.
4. Bartolomeus van der Helst, *Vegetable Seller and Children with a Pig Suspended from a Ladder*, 1666, oil on canvas, 201 x 220 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, inv. 867; the vegetable seller is identfied as the artist's wife, Anna du Pire; see Herman Colenbrander, "Het 'groenwyff' van Bartolomeus van der Helst: Een eerbetoon aan zijn slovende 'Martha' en de 'aemulation van Michiel van Musscher," in *Face Book: Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th–18th Centuries*, ed. Edwin Buijsen, Charles Dumas, and Volker Manuth (Leiden, 2012), 397–404.
5. Michiel van Musscher, *The Haarlemmerdijk with a Pig on a Stepladder*, 1668, oil on canvas, 87 x 75.5 cm, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, inv. SA 38126.
6. See Eddy de Jongh, *Tot lering en vermaak: betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1976), 117–18.
7. "Hoe sterk gy blaast, ô Waerlds Kind! / Gy vangt doch anders niet als wind. / Wat is de Waerld, die het ziet? / Een Blaas yol [*sic*] wind en anders niet; / Laat daar 't onweetende Kind meê speelen: / Maar dat het wys en grys verstand / Geen voddery houde aan de hand / Om in het kinderspel te deelen." Jan Luiken, *Des menschen begin, midden en einde* (Amsterdam, 1712), 46.
8. Eddy de Jongh, *Tot lering en vermaak: betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1976), 118.
9. As dated 1660: Leipziger Kunstverein, *Ausstellung Alte Meister aus Privatbesitz* (Exh. cat. Leipzig,

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Leipziger Kunstverein) (Leipzig, 1929), no. 79; and Leipziger Kunstverein, *Ausstellung Alte Meister aus Mitteldeutschem Besitz* (Exh. cat. Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein) (Leipzig, 1937), 11, no. 52. As dated 1662: Karl Lilienfeld, "Die Ausstellung Alter Meister aus Leipziger Privatbesitz," *Kunstchronik* 26, no. 9 (November 1914): 113; Eduard Plietzsch, "Hollandischer Bilder des 17. Jahrhunderts aus Leipziger Privatbesitz," *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 8 (1915): 49; Eduard Plietzsch, *Holländische und flämische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1960), 60; Marjorie E. Wieseman, "Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting" (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1991), 469; and Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Doornspijk, 2002), 316 (noting that signature and date are not visible in photographs).

10. Information from Technical Summary prepared by Annette Rupprecht.
11. Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 173–74, nos. 11 and 10, respectively.
12. See Marjorie E. Wieseman, "The Craeyvanger Portraits in Context—Shedding Light on Caspar Netscher's Early Career," *Oud Holland* 127 (2014): 31–47.

Provenance

- Iman Pauw (1715–79), The Hague (his sale, The Hague, 23 November 1779, no. 14 [to Abraham Delfos for 65 florins]).
- (Sale, Leiden, 26 August 1788, no. 106 [to Abraham Delfos for 17 florins]).
- Jan Kerkhooven, Leiden (his sale, Leiden, 30 July 1798, no. 17; sale, L. Bouman et al., Leiden, 24 August 1802, no. 36 [for 15 florins]).
- Rudolf Brockhaus (1856–1932), Leipzig, by at least 1914; by descent until at least 1937.
- Private collection, United States, by 1960 (sale, Sotheby's Parke-Bernet, New York, 13 January 1978, no. 122).
- Private collection, Williamstown, Massachusetts, until 1996 [Otto Naumann, Ltd., New York].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2005.

Exhibition History

- Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein, "Ausstellung alter Meister aus Leipziger Privatbesitz," November–December 1914, no. 90 [lent by the family of Rudolf Brockhaus].
- Leipzig, Museum der Bildende Kunst, "Alte Meister aus Privatbesitz," 22 September–31 October 1929,

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no. 79 [lent by the family of Rudolf Brockhaus].

- Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein, “Alte Meister aus Mitteldeutschem Besitz,” 13 May–15 August 1937, no. 52 [lent by the family of Rudolf Brockhaus].
- Albany, Albany Institute of History and Art, “Matters of Taste: Food and Drink in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life,” 21 September–8 December 2002, no. 34 [lent by Otto Naumann, Ltd., New York].
- Ithaca, Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, “An Eye for Detail: Dutch Painting from the Leiden Collection,” 20 September 2014–21 June 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Nivå, The Nivaagaard Collection, “The Joy of Everyday Life in The Netherlands and Denmark,” 28 January–16 June 2024 [lent by the present owner].

References

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- Leipziger Kunstverein. *Ausstellung alter Meister aus Leipziger Privatbesitz*. Exh. cat. Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein. Leipzig, 1914, 9, no. 90.
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- Leipziger Kunstverein. *Alte Meister aus Privatbesitz*. Exh. cat. Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein. Leipzig, 1929, no. 79.
- Leipziger Kunstverein. *Alte Meister aus Mitteldeutschem Besitz*. Exh. cat. Leipzig, Leipziger Kunstverein. Leipzig, 1937, 11, no. 52.
- Plietzsch, Eduard. *Holländische und flämische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Leipzig, 1960, 60.
- Wieseman, Marjorie E. “Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting.” PhD diss. Columbia University, 1991, 469–70, no. B5.
- Wieseman, Marjorie E. *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Doornspijk, 2002, 316, no. B5.
- Barnes, Donna R., and Peter G. Rose. *Matters of Taste: Food and Drink in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life*. Exh. cat. Albany, Albany Institute of History and Art. Albany, 2002, 96–97, no. 34.

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Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, rectangular-shaped non-Baltic oak derived from a tree felled between 1655 and 1665, with an earliest creation date of 1661, has bevels on all four sides.[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has machine tool marks, two paper labels, and handwritten numerals but no wax collection seals, import stamps or panel maker's marks along the reverse.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint applied thinly and smoothly with no use of impasto. No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2005 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Peter Klein's dendrochronology report, dated 6 June 2012.

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