

HENDRICK BLOEMAERT

(Utrecht c. 1601 - Utrecht 1672)

Artemisia in Mourning

signed 'Henr: Bloemaert f.' (lower left)
oil on canvas
65.5 x 177.3 cm (25¾ x 69¾ in)

Provenance: Acquired privately in London c.1900, and thence by descent to the previous owner.

Literature: M. G. Roethlisberger, *Abraham Bloemaert and his Sons*, The Netherlands, 1993, I, pp. 471-2, no. H64; II, fig. H66.

THIS PAINTING BY HENDRICK BLOEMAERT IS A powerful and emotive image of grief. Artemisia II of Caria was a woman associated with extraordinary mourning. After the death of her husband and brother King Mausolus, she devoted the remaining two years of her life, during which time she also ruled Caria, to grieving him and to preserving his memory in perpetuity. During these two years of pining, from 352 to 350 BC, she is reputed to have mixed Mausolus' ashes in her daily drink, persuaded the most eminent Greek rhetoricians to praise him in their oratory and constructed a monument to his memory at Halicarnassus (present day Bodrum, Turkey). So splendid and majestic was the tomb of Mausolus, that Antipater of Sidon listed it as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and it provides the etymology for the word 'mausoleum.'

In *Artemisia in Mourning*, Bloemaert shows the queen kneeling before the enormous golden urn containing the ashes of her late husband. The opulence of the urn and the fresh garland of flowers draped on it suggest the devotion and regard that Mausolus inspired. Next to Artemisia is a priest who swings the thurible full of burning incense over the urn. This is presumably part of the ceremony that takes place before the ashes are

placed in the queen's cup, which she holds in her left hand ready to drink from. She holds her right hand to her breast whilst looking to the heavens, caught up in her memories of Mausolus. The small dog is a symbol of love and fidelity, and emphasises the message of continued loyalty on the part of Mausolus' grieving widow. The rest of the scene depicts courtiers who display a variety of reactions to the queen's grief - some of the men on the right-hand side look on admiringly at Artemisia's devotion, as do her young attendants. However, three kneeling women whisper to each other in an almost disbelieving fashion. The three older, standing figures on the left hold an impromptu conference, their faces etched with concern for their leader. The muted grey palette of the background wall and the urn's raised platform reinforce the sombre mood of the painting.

Bloemaert was the eldest son of the hugely successful painter, Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651) (see Inventory). Hendrick was trained by his father, and this early influence significantly influenced his style and future career. This is clearly illustrated by a comparison of *Artemisia in Mourning* to a work of Abraham's, such as *The Emmaus Disciples* (fig. 1). Abraham's mature work was Caravaggesque in style and paintings such as *The Emmaus Disciples* are marked by intense lighting and dramatic *chiaroscuro*. The careful, often playful, use of light - a key aspect of Abraham's work - is also present in *Artemisia in Mourning*. In both works the only light source seems to emanate from a candle, yet the contrasts between light and dark are powerful. Furthermore, both works focus on the heavy emotional content. In Abraham's work we see the startled reactions of the two disciples as they suddenly realise that the man, to whom they have been talking for some time, is in fact the resurrected Christ. Their expressions are accentuated by that of the servant who is oblivious to the cause of their surprise.

Hendrick is the best known and most accomplished painter of Abraham's sons and, despite his father's enormous artistic influence, was the only painter to continue to work in the master's mature manner. However, later in his career he started to move away from the style associated with Abraham and adopted a more classical approach, as was practised in Utrecht, Haarlem and at Court in the mid to latter part of the seventeenth century.



Abraham Bloemaert, *The Emmaus Disciples*, 1622, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (Figure 1)

The painting is illustrated in detail on opposite page and in full overleaf.





