SPHINX FINE ART

Jan Molenaer II (Haarlem 1654 - Haarlem, after 1684)

The Sense of Taste

signed with monogram 'JMR' (in ligature, upper right)
oil on panel
11.4 x 10.2 cm (4½ x 4 in)

In this diminutive but charming panel, an inebriated drinker turns to meet the viewer's gaze. In his left hand he holds up a full glass, whilst his squint, smirk and glowing nose indicate his drunken state. He is a comical and engaging figure, representing Taste, and the painting would presumably have once been part of a series of works representing the Five Senses.

Peasant scenes were a common subject for Jan Molenaer II, and often they represented one of the Five Senses. In another similarly small panel he painted *A Sense of Smell* (Private Collection). This work is slightly cruder than *The Sense of Taste,* both in terms of execution and the approach to the subject matter. When representing Taste, Molenaer has depicted a raffish, amiable figure, whose drunkenness is overt. However, the narrative is not as theatrical as it is in *The Sense of Smell.*

The Five Senses were a common subject for artists in the Northern Netherlands during the seventeenth century, and were part of a long tradition in Dutch art.[1] However, the subject matter was treated with great variety by artists. Adrian Brouwer's (1605-1638) *The Bitter Potion* (Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main), shows a man whose disgust, at what he has just tasted, appears to be verging on anger. Molenaer's *The Sense of Taste,* like the famous treatment by his namesake Jan Miense Molenaer (1610-1668), lacks the aggressiveness of Brouwer's work, preferring to focus on the comic aspect.[2]

Little is known about Molenaer's life, other than that he is recorded as a Master of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1684. His identity and work have frequently been confused with both Jan Miense Molenaer, who is a clear influence, and a Jan Jacobsz. Molenaer.[3] However, in recent years scholars have started to construct a coherent ouevre, which is focused around depictions of peasant life. He frequently painted en grisaille, and the subtle charm of *The Sense of Taste* is testament to his ability.

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[1] For an extensive examination of the development of this theme, see Nordenfalk, C., 'The Five Senses in Flemish Art before 1600', in *Netherlandish Mannerism,* Cavalli-Björkman, G. (ed.), Stockholm (Nationalmuseum) 1984, pp. 135-54; Idem, 'The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 48 (1985), pp. 1-22.

[2] For a discussion of the comic in Jan Miense Molenaer's *Five Senses,* see Schiller, N., '"To See Ourselves Greatly Misled": The Laughing Deceptions of Jan Miense Molenaer's Five Senses (1637)', in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies,* (XXVIII, 2007), pp. 76-104.

[3] Jan Jacobsz Molenaer is recorded as a member of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1643. See Miedema, H., *De archiefbescheiden van het St. Likasgilde te Haarlem,* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 595-596.