

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot (Utrecht 1586 - Utrecht 1666)

Architectural Ruin with a Crowd

signed 'JC Droochsloot' (lower left)

oil on panel

36 x 57 cm (14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ in)

This crowded painting provides a plethora of detail to absorb the viewer. Milling around a street flanked by classical architecture and overgrown with foliage, stand a number of impoverished figures. Several characters stand out - the two men, whose gaunt bodies are covered only by a few rags, the mother who clutches her baby to her breast whilst another grubby child clings to her arm and the man who hobbles along on crutches. The legless man in the centre of the composition, who uses two blocks to help drag himself through the dusty town, is a recurrent motif in Droochsloot's work. Throughout the painting the figures look dishevelled and destitute.

The significant exception to this is the figure dressed in a pink cloak, standing on the plinth on the right-hand side. His elevation above the street immediately sets him apart from those in the street below, as does the relative luxury of his clothing and his upright and confident pose. The soldier standing nearby adds to the impression that the turbaned man is one of authority and power. Various figures point up towards the plinth further drawing attention to this grouping.

The majority of Droochsloot's paintings depict scenes which are crowded with figures, for instance, the Hermitage's *Rural Feast* (1630-1640s). In *Rural Feast*, as in the present work, Droochsloot has individualised each one of his figures, treating them each with careful attention. There is a considerable variety amongst the groups that make up this scene of rustic celebration. Perhaps the most eye-catching of the peasants is the figure that stands up in the boat, arms outstretched.

Despite compositional similarities, the mood of these scenes varies dramatically, a reflection of

Droochsloot's work as a whole. As well as humble scenes of happy village life he also employed similar backdrops for paintings which depicted extreme violence and often featured plundering soldiers. Paintings such as the present work however 'evinced real sympathy for the poor and oppressed' and are at the core of his oeuvre.¹ In the Rijksmuseum's [*St. Martin Cutting off Part of his Cloak for a Beggar*](#), Droochsloot has actually portrayed a violent beating on the left-hand side, whilst on the right-hand side we see portraits of poverty and helplessness, which are reminiscent of some of those in the present work. Once more, every figure reflects deliberation and thought on the part of the artist, and their individuality and detail engrosses the viewer.

Droochsloot was a versatile painter, whose work reflects the influence of artists such as David Vinckboons (1576-1633). He worked in Utrecht all his life, was dean of the Guild of St. Luke several times, and was also regent of the St. John's hospital, to which he donated appropriate pictures.

Professor A. Mayer, formerly of the Alte Pinakothek, Munich provided expertise in relation to this painting, 5 May, 1930.

¹ Kunzle, D., *From Criminal to Courtier: the Soldier in Netherlandish Art, 1550-1672*, (Brill, 2002), p. 328.

Provenance:

Collection of M. Crabtree, 19th Century London, nr. 113.

Artist description:

Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot was a Dutch painter of genre pictures, village scenes, moral allegories and biblical stories. He was active in Utrecht from 1616 to 1660 and admitted to the Artists' Guild of St Luke in 1616 at the age of 40. He was the Guild's dean from 1623 to 1624.

His early works reflect the influence of Esaias van de Velde, Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger and the Flemish David Vinckboons.

He continued the tradition of Flemish landscape painting. He usually shows a broad village street leading into the distance, with houses on both sides. Village activity is depicted with numerous, rather coarse peasant figures, and a moral note is often struck: people nursing the sick or feeding the poor. He generally uses trees with and without leaves in a schematic pattern. His figures are dispersed somewhat at random, the coloration is as a rule reddish-brown.

He was the teacher of his son, Cornelis Droochsloot (1630-1673), and Jacob Duck (1600-1660).