

Bijl-Van Urk

Richard Morris

Dordrecht 1670 - 1689 Dordrecht

Old man and an owl

Monogrammed: RM

Oil on panel

33 x 26 cm

provenance

Seger Tierens collection

His Sale The Hague July 23 1743 The Hague (Hoet volume 2, 1752) lot 166

HdG, p. 353, nr. 106c; Alter mit Eule. Versteigerung Brenken u.a., Köln, 1 april 1886, no. 91

Private collection

Description

An older man holds an owl on his hand, he is pointing his finger.

This picture was previously attributed to Carel de Moor due to the similarities in style and a misreading of the monogram RM.

The discovery by Guido Jansen of a long forgotten line in the 1743 sale catalogue of Seger Tierens made it possible to rediscover the artist Richard Morris

Seger Tierens Sale 1743

The sale of Seger Tierens which was published in Hoets *Catalogus of naamlijst van schilderijen met derzelver prijzen...* Volume 2 1752 (Catalogue of paintings with prices) describes the picture as: An older man with an owl on his hand by R. Moris, famous student of G. Schalcken, died young, so little known, High one foot and three quarter wide ten and a quarter thumb.

figuuren en veel bywerk, zynde een teekening, door Gerard Dou, h. 2 v. 2 d., br. 1 v. 7 d. 50 - 10
166 Een oud Mannetje met een Uil op de Hand, door R. Moris, voornaam Discipel van G. Schalcke, zynde vroeg gestorven, daarom weinig bekend, h. 1 v. en drie vierde d., br. 10 en een vierde d. 75 - 0

The description in Hoet

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The picture was sold for 75 guilders a relatively high price for that moment and one of the more expensive pictures in this sale.

In the eighteenth century the picture must have been well known since the famous art collector and painter Jan Stolker (1724-1785) made a coloured drawing after the picture. This drawing was at the end of the eighteenth century in the Ploos van Amstel collection. The sale catalogue in 1800 describes the drawing in dossier Y number 37 as follows:

An old man with an owl on his hand, in a landscape; with colours, after R. Morus, by J. Stolker. (Y37 een oud Man met een Uil op zyn hand, in een landschap; met couleuren, naar R. Morus, door J. Stolker.)

The present location of this coloured drawing is unknown to us at the moment.

A preparatory line drawing by Stolker after the picture is nowadays in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.



Jan Stolker, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam
inv.nr. MB 1992/T 2-179 recto PK.

R. Moris

The painter Moris is indeed unknown to us. Tracing his life in art literature gives us no more information than the facts named in the sale catalogue from 1743. The painter Moris is mentioned in dictionaries by Van Eynden Van der Willigen, Kramm, Immerzeel, Wurzbach and Thieme Becker.

Only Van Eynden van der Willigen provides us with additional information concerning the drawing in the Ploos Van Amstel collection which the authors must have seen. Wurzbach copies this information. None of the authors was familiar with the painting itself. They all copied the information from their predecessors or directly from Hoet.

Student of Schalcken

The painter R. Moris was a student of Godfried Schalcken. This painter was born in Made in 1643. He studied under Samuel van Hoogstraeten in Dordrecht and under Gerard Dou in Leiden where he lived from 1663 until 1675. From that year until 1691 he lived in Dordrecht. Afterwards he lived in The Hague apart from small sojourns in London and Dusseldorf. The name Morris was a common name in the western part of Holland. Research in the cities where Schalcken lived during different periods of his life provided only one match with an R. Morris in Dordrecht.

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Student of Schalcken

Richard Morris was a student of Godfried Schalcken (1642-1706) in Dordrecht from around 1685 and probably until his premature death in 1689. In the unpublished notes of Dr. Abraham Bredius in the RKD there is one document concerning Morris. It confirms the presence of Morris in the entourage of Schalcken. Together with another student of the painter, the more famous Arnold Boonen (1669-1729) Morris sign a notarial act as witness. This document was signed the first of December 1685 at Notary van Neeten in Dordrecht. It concerns a land from the inventory of the late Beens, the granny of Francoise van Diemen, Schalckens wife.

The parents must have been married before 1669, since a child of them is buried in the Augustijnenchurch in Dordrecht on August 30 of that year.

A younger brother named Hendrijck Morrists, after his father, was born June 19th 1673. No further records concerning Morris are known.

But July 15th 1689 a certain Hendrick Mauritz buries a son in the Augustijnenchurch in Dordrecht.

Since a small difference in orthography is normal in the 17th century it is very likely that this Hendrick Mauritz is the same as Hendrik Morris, father of Richard Morris. Children became mature at an age of 25 in Holland in the 17th century so it wasn't unusual to be buried as a child of at the age of 18. Most probably this is the record of the burial of Richard Morris. A few years later the famous painter Aelbert Cuyp would be buried in the same church.

Other pictures by Richard Morris

Although long forgotten another picture by Morris was sold at auction in the Hague July 5th 1814 lot 453: A woman in a niche with a yo-yo (details from the Getty provenance index)

Dr. Abraham Bredius mentions in the Old Netherlandish art inventories in the RKD "Een schilderij van Moriu" a picture by Moriu in the inventory of A. Van Cruijskerken, Leiden, 11 December 11th 1705 (see RKD). Possibly this is a misreading of the name Morris.

The archives of the Dordrecht Guild of St. Luke haven't been preserved. So it is not possible to see when Richard Morris became student with Godfried Schalcken. He probably never became master since he was only 18 when he died. The two descriptions of pictures by him are in subject and style derived from his master Schalcken. He was very talented but became never so mature that he developed his own style.

On the subject of this picture.

The depiction of an older man with an owl is not very common in Dutch art. The meaning of the picture is rather confuse. On the one hand there is the saying: *als de uil niet zien en wil, baat er kaars nog bril* (If an owl won't see, no candle or glasses will help) which means that the man is stupid since he's trying to teach the owl something.

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On the other hand it is possible that Democritus with an owl is depicted here.

This 5th century BC Greek philosopher Democritus was well known in seventeenth century Holland since the theme of Democritus and Heraclitus was very popular. (see A. Blankert: Heraclitus en Democritus in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 18 (1967) pp.31-124)

A sixteenth century emblem “Nox habet consilium” depicts Democritus together with an owl. The meaning of the emblem, is in the saying “The best advice is found on the pillow.” The night has secret advice for big things.

In conjunction to this meaning can be noted that Democritus wrote a piece about the eyes of the owl.

Democrit und Eule, Sonne und Mond

An. S. 51

NOX HABET CONSILIVM.



ERVAT ipse oculos sibi clarius vt videat quis:
Desipiet. Fecit Democritus sapiens.
Democritus Sapiens Medico vel iudice Coo¹).
Caeca die cui adstat Noctua nocte videns.
ADMONET hoc magnis quod postea rebus agendis
NOX habet arcanum prouida consilium.

*nächtliche
Beschlüsse*

Die Nacht bringt klugen Rat

Es mag sich einer selbst die Augen ausreißen, damit er klarer sehe: er wird unsinnig handeln. [Doch] tat das der weise Democrit – Democrit, weise sogar nach dem Urteil des coischen Arztes¹), dem die Eule zur Seite steht, blind bei Tage, sehend bei Nacht. Dies lehrt uns, daß die hellsichtige Nacht geheimen Rat hat für große Dinge, die später zu tun sind.

¹) Hippocrates
Philo, de prov. II 13

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Picture from: Henkel, Schöne, *Emblemata, Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts*, Taschenausgabe Weimar 1996

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Literature on the artist

G.Hoet, *Catalogus of Naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelver pryzen, zedert een lange reeks van jaaren zoo in Holland als op andere plaatzen in het openbaar verkogt. Benevens een verzameling van lysten van verscheyden nog in wezen zynde cabinetten*, Part II, 's Gravenhage 1752

R. Van Eynden, A. van der Willigen, *Geschiedenis der vaderlansche schilderkunst, sedert de helft der XVIII eeuw*, 4 parts, Haarlem 1816-1840.

J. Immerzeel, *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters, van het begin der vijftiende eeuw tot heden*, 3 parts Amsterdam 1842,1843.

C. Kramm, *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters, van den vroegsten tot op onzen tijd*, 6 parts, Amsterdam 1857-1864.

A. von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon*, 3 parts, Vienna 1906-1911.

U. Thieme, F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 37 parts, Leipzig 1907-1950.

On the subject:

A. Blankert: Heraclitus en Democritus in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 18 (1967) pp.31-124.

Henkel, Schöne, *Emblemata, Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts*, Taschenausgabe Weimar 1996.