



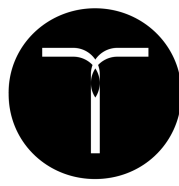
Cornelis Troost, *Feast of St Nicholas*, Tertius Gallery, Amsterdam

It is not often that a work of art that was thought to have been lost for centuries suddenly turns up, but now it has. The PAN is now showing a beautiful gouache by the most important Dutch artist of the eighteenth century, Cornelis Troost (1696-1750), which until now has been in dormant private hands. In 1761 this drawing was made into a print by Jacobus Houbraken (Fig. 1), and the publisher Pieter Fouquet Junior dedicated it to the then owner Dionis Muilman (1702-1772). This wealthy merchant, banker and member of the Amsterdam city council, who lived on Keizergracht and also owned the country house 'Veelzigt' on Noorderspaarne near Haarlem, had



1. Jacobus Houbraken after Cornelis Troost, *Feast of St Nicholas*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

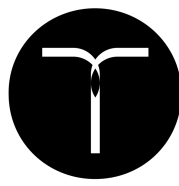
had assembled a very extensive collection of drawings and prints from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. After Muilman's death, his heir had this collection auctioned off in Amsterdam on 29 March 1773 and the following days. No fewer than 1704 drawings (divided among 1611 lot numbers) came under the hammer. These included works by all the important Dutch draughtsmen. From the sixteenth century, for example, Abraham Bloemaert



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and Hendrick Goltzius, and from the seventeenth century Ludolf Bakhuizen, Nicolaes Berchem, Allart van Everdingen, Jan van Goyen, Pieter de Molijn, Adriaen van Ostade and Jacob van Ruisdael. The title page of the auction catalogue states that among these drawings ‘uitmunten de Werken van den beroemden (excel the works of the famous) REMBRAND VAN RHYN’. There were thirteen of them. As for the eighteenth century, Muilman showed a preference for works by Jan van Huysum, Isaac de Moucheron and Nicolaes Verkolje. But seven drawings by Cornelis Troost were also among them, such as a ‘Çorps de Garde’ (now in the Amsterdam Museum), two drama scenes, the ‘Spilpenning’ and ‘Crispyn Medicyn’ (both now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg), a landscape with a carriage with three horses (now in the KOG, Amsterdam) and ‘An excellent Drawing, zynde een Avondlicht, waar in het zingen met de Ster verbeeld is’ (an excellent drawing, an Evening Light, in which the singing of the star is depicted) (now in Teylers Museum, Haarlem). The last sheet was sold for the high price of 241 guilders to the famous collector Cornelis Ploos van Amstel. Troost’s *St Nicholas Feast*, however, does not appear in the auction catalogue. This may mean that this drawing had already been sold, but it is more likely that the heir withheld this gouache because he was interested in it. Muilman’s wife, Sara Cockey, had already died in 1763 and their marriage had been childless, so the heir must have been Dionis’ younger brother, the banker Nicolaas Muilman (1709-1790). It is quite possible that the drawing was inherited by one of his sons, Henric and Pieter, until it reached its current owner.

Troost’s depiction of an eighteenth-century St. Nicholas feast, in which a couple with their four children and a maid are grouped around a table, and on which three children receive toys and delicacies, while the crying boy on the left is punished with the oar, has remained an incredibly popular image to



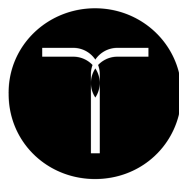
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this day because of Houbraken's print. In the 'Sinterklaas' literature, it returns again and again. But the composition has also often been copied. A fine example is a watercolour by the amateur artist Maria Christina Archduchess



2. Maria Christina of Austria, *Feast of St Nicholas*, Schloss Schönbrunn, Vienna

of Austria (1742-1798), a daughter of Emperor Franz I Stefan, and the wife of Albert Casimir Duke of Saxe-Teschen, Governor of the Austrian Netherlands and founder of one of the world's most important print rooms, the Albertina in Vienna. In her copy (fig. 2), Maria Christina made a few changes to the interior, omitted one of the children, dressed the figures in contemporary costumes and changed their facial features. Thus it has become a family portrait: at the table is her father, and next to him is her mother, Empress



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Maria Theresa. Maria Christina has herself depicted on the far left (instead of the maidservant), with in front of her her little brother Ferdinand Charles (1754-1806). The other two children of this family are pictured: Marie Antoinette (1755-1793) and Maximilan Frans (1756-1801).

Troost's work enjoys great interest. That was already the case in his own time. It is therefore not surprising that his paintings and drawings were frequently printed by such diverse engravers as Abraham Delfos, Simon Fokke, Jabes Heenck, Robbert Muys, Jan Punt, Pieter Tanjé, and especially by Jacobus Houbraken, from whom some thirty prints after Troost have been preserved. Of only a small number of these prints the original by Troost is known to us. We must fear that the others have somehow been lost. It is therefore particularly pleasing that this beautiful gouache by this so talented artist has emerged after more than two-and-a-half centuries. The sheet represents an important addition to Troost's oeuvre and to our knowledge of it.

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