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EST. 1817

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David Teniers the Younger (Antwerp 1610-1690 Brussels)

The Fishmonger

Signed and dated "D. TENIERS FE. / 1647"
(lower right)

Oil on canvas

33 ½ x 48 ½ in. (85 x 123 cm.)



Provenance

Possibly identical to a picture which the artist is reputed to have presented in 1647 to Archduke Leopold-Wilhelm of Austria (1614-1662), Governor of the Spanish Netherlands (see note below).

Anna Theresia van Halen (†1749), Antwerp; her sale, Antwerp, 19 August 1749, lot 7.

Jacques Clémens (1713-1779), Canon of St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium, almost certainly acquired at the above sale; his sale, Maison Mortuaire, Ghent, Philippe Gimblet and brothers, 21 June 1779 and the following days, no. 269,

where acquired by van den Berghe¹.

Anonymous sale, J.-B. Lebrun, Paris, May 1803, no. 4.

Baron Jules Paul Benjamin Delessert (1773-1847), Paris (recorded in his possession in 1824 when housed at no. 3 rue Coq-Héron; probably purchased by him in the Lebrun sale in 1803)².

By inheritance to his brother the banker François-Marie Delessert (1780-1868), Paris, his sale, 15-18 March, 1869, Paris, lot. 87, where bought for 159,000 Francs by the following

Count Henri Greffulhe (1815-1879), French politician and member of the Société d'Encouragement.³

By inheritance to his brother the banker and politician and member of the Senate Count Louis-Charles Greffulhe (1814-1888).

His son Count Henri Greffulhe (1848-1932).⁴

His daughter Countess Èlaine Greffulhe (1882-1958) who married Count Armand de Gramont (1879-1962), and thence by descent until 2017.

Exhibited

Paris, Palais de Bourbon, *Exposition en faveur de l'œuvre des Alsaciens-Lorrains*, 1874.

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Literature

- G. Hoet, *Catalogues of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelver pryzen, zedert een langen reeks van jaaren 200 in Holland als op andere plaatsen in het openbaar verkogt, benevens een verzameling van listen van verscheyden nog in wezen zynde cabinetten*, The Hague, 1752, vol. II p. 256.
- C. Harmand, *Manuel de l'amateur des arts dans Paris pour 1824: contenant la description complète des Musées royaux, et Galeries et Collections publiques et particulières, et de tout ce qui a rapport aux arts du dessin*, Paris, 1824, p. 156.
- J. Smith, *A catalogue raisonné of the works of the most eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French painters*, London, 1831, vol. III, p. 275, no. 51.
- G. Rathgeber, *Annalen der niederländischen Malerei und Kupferstecherkunst. Von Rubens Abreise nach Italien bis nach Rembrandts Tod*, Gotha, 1839, IV, p. 133.
- F. Delessert, *Catalogue de tableaux de M. Francois Delessert*, Paris, 1844, no. 175.
- B. & F. Delessert, *Notice sur la collection de tableaux de MM Delessert*, Paris, 1844, no. 119.
- B. & F. Delessert, *Notice sur la collection de tableaux de MM Delessert*, Paris, 1846, no. 172.
- E. Feydeau, 'La galerie Delessert', in *Revue internationale de l'art et de la curiosité*, Paris, 1869, 15 February 1869, p. 186.
- C. Blanc, 'Galerie Delessert', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1 March 1869, 153 livraison, T. I, 2nd part, Paris, 1869, pp. 210-11, illustrated with an etching after the picture. The article was included as a preface in the sale catalogue of the Delessert Collection in 1869.
- Ph. Burty, 'La vente Delessert', in *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, Paris, 21 March 1869, p. 2.
- D. Mündler, 'Die Versteigerung der Galerie Delessert', in *Kunst-Chronik*, 16 April 1869, p. 122.
- A. Michiels, *Histoire de la peinture flamande depuis ses débuts jusqu'en 1864*, vol. VIII, Paris, 1869, Chapter XX1, *La Famille Teniers*, pp. 45-47.
- Ch. Timbal, 'L'exposition de peinture du Palais-Bourbon au profit des Alsaciens-Lorrains', in *Revue des deux mondes*, Paris, 1874, 15 May 1874, 3rd part, V. III, p. 454.
- P. Mantz, 'Exposition en faveur des Alsaciens-Lorrains (2^e article)', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 1874, 1st September 1874, 2nd part. vol. X, p. 214.
- F. C. Petersen, 'Die Kunstausstellung im Palais Bourbon zu Paris', in *Deutsche Warte, Umschau über das Leben und Schaffen der Gegenwart*, Karlsruhe, 1875, VIII, p. 114.
- Ch. Guelette, 'La collection de M. H. de Greffulhe', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 1st February 1877, 2nd part, vol. XV, pp. 156-157.
- T. W. Gaethgens & B. Paul, *Wilhelm von Bode, Mein Leben*, Berlin, 1997, vol. I, p. 9, vol. II, p. 10.

This newly rediscovered picture, previously known only from a nineteenth century engraving (fig. 1), published in conjunction with its appearance in the famous sale of the Delessert collection in Paris in 1869, and publicly unseen since its inclusion in a charity exhibition in Paris in 1874, has rightly been considered one of David Teniers the Younger's masterpieces. It was already described as a *chef-d'œuvre* in the eighteenth century (*op. cit.*, 1779), and it is undoubtedly the greatest genre painting by the artist to have

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appeared on the art market in recent times. In the preface to his *A catalogue raisonné of the works of the most eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French painters*, John Smith states that many of David Teniers the Younger's finest works are dated 1647 (*op. cit.*, p. 254), i.e. the date of the present picture.

Teniers was at this time living in Antwerp. Situated in the estuary of the river Scheldt, Antwerp was for centuries the most prominent harbour in Western Europe. The County of Flanders on the western bank, and Zeeland and the Duchy of Brabant on the east were part of the Habsburg possessions of the Seventeen Provinces. After that, Antwerp fell back under Spanish control in 1585, the Dutch Republic took control of Zeeuws-Vlanderen, a strip of land on the left bank on the river Scheldt, and closed it for shipping, blocking the city's access to the sea. This had a devastating effect on trade and the importation of goods and natural products, amongst them sea fish, the most important food product at the time. Having comprised part of weekly meals, it became a scarcity and a luxury. The estuary remained closed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁵ Interestingly, the fish depicted in the present picture comprise mostly sea fish (see attached report). Flemish still life painting during the seventeenth century was a celebration of life and nature. Unlike the Protestant Netherlands, Belgium experienced a Catholic revival, and a task worthy for artists was to represent the glorification of God's creation.⁶ Depictions of fish markets, fish stores, fishmongers and fish still lifes with their abundance and variety of fish on display were not unusual and symbolized, like many other type of still lifes, God's existence and Christ's charity.⁷

In the background of the present picture, Teniers has included a depiction of Rome, showing the Tiber, with the Ponte Sant'Angelo and St. Peter's Basilica. This was first pointed out in the description of the picture by C. Harmand in 1824, *op. cit.*. The staffage, however, is based on Flemish models. From an art historical viewpoint, the inclusion of a view of Rome in a subject which is distinctly Flemish in character is unprecedented in art from the southern Netherlands. The view is not a *capriccio* view, the most common way to depict Rome amongst Dutch and Flemish artists of the seventeenth century, but an accurate topographical view. It is taken from a point close to where the Ponte Umberto bridge is situated today and the building in the far distance is probably the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere. However, Teniers is not known to have visited Rome, which implies that he must have based the view on period engravings, paintings or drawings, perhaps by his father, David Teniers the Elder, who studied under Adam Elsheimer in Rome. One painting by Teniers the Elder incorporating a similar view of Rome in the background is known, *Paulus and Barnabas in Lystra*, dating from before 1623 (E. Duveberger & H.

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Vlieghe, *David Teniers Der Ältere. Ein vergessener flämischer nachfolger Adam Elsheimer*, 1971, p. 24, ill. 30). The picture is lost but known from an illustration in a 1915 auction catalogue.⁸

Teniers has lent his own features for the gentleman in the centre of the painting wearing a red coat, the fishmonger's client. This was already noticed in the sale of the Clémens Collection in 1779 but is not mentioned in subsequent descriptions of the picture. The artist has included himself in several other works, for example *The Denial of St. Peter with card players* (fig. 2, Musée du Louvre), but not as prominently positioned as here. Both the fishmonger and his client are depicted in vibrantly coloured clothes, green and red, whereas the rest of the staffage are rendered in a more monochrome colour scheme (with the exception of the tiny figures along the riverbank in the background, who are also dressed in colourful costumes). The stark contrast in the colouring focuses our attention on the main characters in the scene. In Teniers's monumental picture *The Palace Kitchen* – an allegory of the four elements from 1646 (171 x 237 cm., The Hermitage) – 'Water' is represented by a fishmonger who is depicted wearing a green jacket which is virtually identical to the green jacket the fishmonger is wearing in the present work. This suggests that this outfit at the time may have been a trademark for fishmongers in Antwerp.⁹

The majority of the figures are positioned in the picture's immediate foreground. This, in combination with their significant scale, closes the distance between the viewer and the subject, inviting us to participate in the scene, not unlike an audience witnessing a performance on stage. The foreground is connected with the background by a sweeping curve formed by the river and the foreground. The distance between the nearest and the furthest point is clearly marked out by the progressive differences in scale between the fishermen and the other figures on its shore. Combined with the vast expanse of sky this creates a tremendous sense of depth and space. In addition, the subtle attention and modelling of light and shadow unevenly cast on the ground from the clouds, creates an impression of movement; at any moment the clouds are expected to drift away and thereby radically changing the scenery. Two of the figures, the black page and the young fisherman on the right, who is displaying the rich assortment of fish just purchased by the gentleman in the red coat, are looking at something that takes place outside the immediate subject, which we, the viewers, cannot see. This seemingly insignificant detail provides the viewer with the impression that the subject continues beyond the confines of the picture's borders thereby further increasing the sense of space.

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Nothing is securely known of the painting's history prior to its appearance in the collection of Anna Theresia van Halen, Antwerp (†1649). Its large scale, quality and year of execution, 1647, suggest that it must have belonged to a very wealthy client during Teniers's lifetime. In February 1647, Archduke Leopold-Wilhelm of Austria (1614-1662), the son of Emperor Ferdinand II, succeeded Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand as governor of the Spanish Netherlands, a position he held until 1656. The Archduke took up residence at Palace Coudenberg in Brussels. He was a highly cultivated man with wide artistic interests in art, literature, music and drama. He arranged the first performance of an opera at the Brussels court and over the years built up what was the largest collection of paintings in Europe, consisting of 880 works by artists from the Netherlands, Germany and Italy. The bulk of his collection is still intact today and forms the nucleus of the paintings collection at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

At the beginning of November 1647 Leopold-Wilhelm visited the Bishop of Ghent, Anthonius Triest (1576-1657). Triest was one of the leading exponents of the Counter-Reformation in the Southern Netherlands, and an energetic agent of ecclesiastical reform in his diocese. He was also one of the most prominent patrons of the arts in the Southern Netherlands and a highly discriminating connoisseur of art. The work of David Teniers the Younger must have occupied a special place in his vast collection, for he owned a number of pictures by him. In a letter dated 8 November to his brother Emperor Ferdinand III, the Archduke describes the great astonishment aroused in him by the modern Flemish paintings in Triest's collection (M. Klinge in the catalogue of the exhibition at The Courtauld Institute, London, 19 October 2006-21 January 2007, *David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting*, p. 12). Leopold-Wilhelm expressed unreserved admiration for the work of David Teniers the Younger and was confident that they would please the Emperor too. In the same letter he expects Teniers to present himself as soon as possible and to bring with him a large painting, one of best he has ever made. By December 1647, Teniers had entered into the archduke's service at his Brussels court, although he continued to live in Antwerp until at least November 1649. Teniers was not only employed as a painter but also as keeper of the collection of pictures that Leopold-Wilhelm was then forming with the rank of "ayuda de camara". In July 1650 Teniers succeeded Jan van den Hoeck (1611-1651) as official court painter and moved from Antwerp to Brussels. From then on, his main task was to make paintings glorifying Leopold-Wilhelm's image as a military commander, a pious Catholic, and an art lover.

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The large picture Teniers presented to Leopold-Wilhelm in 1647, on the occasion of their first meeting, has not been identified and has consequently been considered lost. It is tempting to speculate whether the present picture could be that one. Several characteristics of the present work certainly make this plausible; its scale and date of execution which correspond to the little that is known about it, the inclusion of the artist's self-portrait in the centre of the composition and the depiction of Rome in the background of the picture. The artist has portrayed himself as a gentleman, in a vividly coloured red coat which makes him the undisputable focal point of the picture. This must have served a particular purpose, since it is unprecedented for a Flemish artist in the seventeenth century to portray himself in such a prominent fashion. Teniers had a powerful yearning for status and luxury. The inventory of property drawn up after his wife's death in 1656, Anna Breughel, certainly reflects the family's lavish lifestyle (H. Vlieghe, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-3). Shortly after the death of his wife he married a lady from an aristocratic family. Teniers's prominent position within the picture may therefore be a reflection of his sense of pride. At the time he painted the picture he may additionally already have known that he was going to be employed by the Archduke. During the seventeenth century it became common in Flanders to wear a red hat as an expression of Catholic faith. Historically the colour red has been of high significance amongst Roman Catholics. Cardinals wear red robes as an association to the passion of Christ since the colour symbolizes the blood of Christ. During the Renaissance it was not unusual to refer to cardinals as "priests of the blood". The positioning of the coat, draped over the gentleman's left shoulder, makes its resemblance to a cardinal's robe even more striking. By portraying himself in a red coat, Teniers may accordingly have endeavoured to show that he was a devout Catholic. The view of Rome, finally, may have served as a reference to Rome as the centre of Roman Catholic faith; the Vatican City State and the Pope as head of the Roman Catholic Church, under which the archduke nominally served.

Anna Theresia van Halen, Antwerp, the first recorded owner of this painting, owned thirty-six other works by Teniers – a staggering and unprecedented accumulation of paintings by the same artist. In all, her collection contained 137 paintings including several important works by Rubens and van Dyck. The Jacques Clémens collection featured a number of significant paintings, several of which he had acquired in the sale of Anna Theresia van Halen, including *The Smoker* by Adriaen Brouwer (1620-1638) (Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main) and *The Serenade* by Jacob Jordaen's (1593-1678) (formerly Empress Josephine's Collection, Malmaison, now private collection, Antwerp).

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The Delessert collection was one of the best known art collections in Paris and certainly one of the most important. It comprised of Italian, French, Dutch and Flemish paintings of the highest quality, amongst them several masterpieces; *The Virgin and Child* by Raphael (Musée Condé, Chantilly, fig.3), *The Visit* by Peter de Hooch (The Metropolitan Museum), *Dune Landscape in a storm* by Jacob van Ruisdael (Philadelphia Museum of Art), *Portrait of Michel Le Blon* by Anthony van Dyck (Art Gallery of Ontario) and *Belisarius* by Baron Gérard (The Getty Museum), to name but a few. The collection was largely formed by Baron Jules Paul Benjamin Delessert (1773-1847) (some of them he had inherited). In his description of the collection C. Harmand, *Manuel de l'amateur des arts dans Paris pour 1824*, *op. cit.*, p, 155 noted that the pictures were without exception of the highest quality and in perfect state of preservation. In 1844, his brother Francois-Marie Delessert (1788-1868) published a complete catalogue on the collection. Following his brother's death, he inherited the collection. He and his son Francois-Benjamin Marie Delessert (1817-1868) both died in 1868 and the following year the collection was put up for sale. The news of the sale resulted in a number of articles in French and German press. *The Fishmonger* was greatly admired and sparked more interest amongst many writers than the picture that carried the highest estimate, Raphael's *The Virgin and Child* (fig.3), previously in the collection of the Duke of Orléans. The buyer of the Teniers, Count Henri Greffulhe, managed to secure it only after a long bidding war against the Emperor of Russia, Alexander II himself (Ch. Guelette, *op. cit.*). The staggering price paid for it, 159,000 Francs, the highest price in the sale, can only be fully understood in the context of the price paid for Raphael's painting, the star of the sale, which was bought for 150,000 Francs by Henri d'Orléans, Duke of Aumale, 9,000 Francs less than the Teniers. The price, however, was not without precedence. In 1867 the Belgian government paid £5,000 for Teniers's *Village Pastoral* from 1652, which is now in the Brussels Museum. The price paid for Teniers's painting in comparison to the painting by Raphael was commented on by Otto Mündler (1811-1870), the dealer and art historian, in a letter dated 22 March 1869, a few days after the sale, to the young Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1914), the eminent art historian (T. W. Gaethgens & B. Paul, *op. cit.*): 'Raffael wurde von Teniers besiegt zur schmerzlichen Überraschung aller derer, welche bei dieser Gelegenheit mit Sicherheit auf den Triumph der italien. Schule, auf den Sieg des Ideals gerechnet hatten.' ('Raphael was defeated by Teniers which was a painful surprise to all those, whom surely had counted on the triumph of the Italian School, the victory of ideals'). J. Smith, *op. cit.*, in 1831 valued the present picture at 300 guineas, one of the most expensive pictures in his comprehensive list of *circa* 900 of the artists' work.

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Notes:

1. There were at least three collectors by this name active during this period: Robert-Jean-Baptiste van den Berghe († before 1828), distinguished amateur of Fine Art and Science from Ghent; Jean-Joseph van den Berghe from Coutrai (Kortrijk), and the lawyer (Advocat) van den Berghe from Nieulant. Robert-Jean-Baptiste van den Berghe's collection was sold at auction in Ghent in 1829, which makes him an unlikely candidate since it was not a practice at the time amongst collectors to part with a picture that they had purchased.

2. Jules Paul Benjamin Delessert was the son of Étienne Delessert (1735-1816), the founder of the first fire insurance company and the first discount bank in France. In 1795 he was entrusted with the management of the bank. He started many commercial enterprises, founding the first cotton factory in Passy in 1801, and a sugar factory in 1802 where Jean-Baptiste Quérueu developed the industrial manufacture of sugar from sugar beet, and for which he was created a baron of the Empire by Napoleon. He sat in the chamber of deputies for many years, and was a strong advocate for many improvements for humanitarian conditions, notably the suppression of the Tours or revolving box at the foundling hospital, the suppression of the death penalty, and the improvement of the penitentiary system. He was made regent of the Bank of France in 1802, and was also member of, and, indeed, founder of many learned and philanthropic societies. In 1818 he founded with Jean-Conrad Hottinger the first saving bank in France, the Groupe Caisse d'Épargne together with Jean-Conrad Hottinger and maintained a keen interest in it until his death in 1847. He was also an ardent botanist and oncologist; his botanical library contained 30,000 volumes, of which he published a catalogue *Musée botanique de M. Delessert* (1845). He also wrote *Des avantages de la caisse d'épargne et de prévoyance* (1835), *Mémoire sur un projet de bibliothèque royale* (1836), *Le Guide de bonheur* (1839), and *Recueil de coquilles décrites par Lamarck* (1841-1842).

3. Henry Greffulhe was one of France's richest men. His family had made an immense fortune during the French Revolution. The famous horse race, Prix Greffulhe, originally run at Longchamp, was established in 1882 in his memory.

4. Henry Greffulhe was married to Elisabeth (1860-1952), the daughter of Joseph de Riquet de Caraman, Prince de Chimay, a renowned beauty and one of the leaders of Parisian social life during the Directory. Henry Greffulhe and his wife were the main inspirations for the character of the duke and duchess de Guermantes in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du Temps perdu*, written between 1871-1922. They had one daughter, Élane (1882-1958), who married Armand, 12th Duke of Gramont (1879-1962), a close friend of Proust. Armand was a great collector of paintings as well as a scientist and an industrialist. The pair had five children. Following Henri Greffulhe's death in 1932 a selection of his collection was sold at Sotheby's, London (*Catalogue of a selected portion of the renowned collection of pictures and drawings formed by the Comte Greffulhe (1848-1932)*, 22 July 1937). For further reading see E. Legay, *Le comte Henry Greffulhe: un grand notable en Seine-et-Marne*, 1987.

5. Access to the river was the subject of the brief Kettle War of 1784. It was not until the French occupation of the Netherlands in 1795 that the blockade was lifted and the river reopened.

6. Fish markets, fish stores, fishmongers and fish still lifes was a speciality invented by Pieter Aertsen and his pupil Joachim Beuckelaer in Antwerp around 1570, during the tumultuous times of the Iconoclasm

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(1566), which disrupted the art market and motivated a change from purely religious to more secular themes. In their work the flourishing fish industry is celebrated through the display of the great bounty from the sea. Such pictures also embraced a moralizing subtext, warning against the excesses of food and sexual pleasures (Exh. cat., Utrecht, Centraalmuseum, *Fish: still lifes by Dutch and Flemish masters, 1550-1700*, 2004).

7. The main objective of Dutch masters of still life painting was to express the idea of the futility of all things and the proximity of death, “vanity of vanities”, as spoken by the Preacher (King David of Jerusalem) in the opening passage of the Ecclesiastes (1:1-11), a theme that also occupied Protestant theologians.

8. Müller, Amsterdam, Coll. Peltzer, 26-27 May 1915, lot 17. The view of Rome is in the opposite sense to how it appears in reality. This suggests that the illustration in the catalogue erroneously was printed in the wrong direction, unless, of course, Teniers the Elder based his view on an engraving.

9. Next to him a young boy is seen pouring fish from a basket onto the floor in a virtually identical pose as the boy pouring fish onto the ground in the present picture, but in reverse.



Fig. 1: Edmond Hédouin, *Le marché au poisson*, 1869, sale catalogue, 15-18 March 1869.

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Fig. 2: David Teniers the Younger, *The Denial of St. Peter with card players*, The Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 3: Raphael, *The Madonna of the House of Orléans* (c. 1506-1507), The Musée Condé, Chantilly.