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EST. 1817

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Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen (Amsterdam circa 1470-1533)

The Crucifixion

Dated on the grey horse's harness: 'anno DN / M+CCCC ET VII'

Oil on panel

39 x 30 7/8 in. (99.1 x 78.7 cm.)



Provenance

Moctezuma Collection, Buenos Aires;
Sale, Buenos Aires (Ramos Oromf and Co.), October 2-5, 1944, lot 324, reproduced (as Michel Wolgemut);
Private Collection, Buenos Aires;
Private Collection, Brazil, since circa 1935;
Sale, New York, Sotheby's, January 13, 1993, lot 25, where acquired by Otto Naumann, Ltd, New York, by whom sold to Private Collection, New York, c. 1995.
Private collection, Massachusetts.

Literature

L. Helmus (ed.), *Catalogue of Paintings 1363-1600: Centraal Museum Utrecht*, Utrecht, 2011, pp. 108-114.
D. Meuwissen, 'A painter in black and white: the symbolic relationship between the paintings and woodcuts of Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen', in M. Faries (ed.), *Making and Marketing: Studies of the Painting Process in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Workshops*, Turnhout, 2006, pp. 55-81.

Exhibited

New York, Otto Naumann, Ltd, *Inaugural Exhibition of Old Master Paintings*, January 12 — March 1, 1995, pp. 16-20, colour illustration (entry by Anne Woollett).
Amsterdam Museum; Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar; Sint Laurenskerk, Alkmaar; *Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen (ca. 1475-1533). De Renaissance in Amsterdam en Alkmaar*, March 15 — June 29, 2014, pp. 174-175, no. 4, illustrated.

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Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen occupies a seminal position in the history of Dutch painting as one of the first important artists active in Amsterdam. In addition to portraits and history paintings, his expertise extended to the production of woodcuts, stained glass, book illustrations and embroidery designs. Stylistically, Jacob Cornelisz.'s works on panel are characterized by a fusion of elements from the late fifteenth-century Haarlem school as well as the contemporary decorative proclivities associated with Mannerism. His popularity, coupled with the vigorous activity of his workshop, enabled Amsterdam to assume a new prestige in the early sixteenth century as a significant artistic centre on a par with Leiden and Haarlem. One of only twelve dated compositions by Jacob Cornelisz., the *Crucifixion* represents an extremely high quality and recently rediscovered addition to the earliest phase of his career.

According to Carel van Mander, *Jacob Cornelisz. Uytmemende Schilder* (excellent painter) was born in the village of Oostanen (Oost-Zaandam) in Waterland, about seven miles north of Amsterdam¹. Although Van Mander was unacquainted with the artist's date of birth, he noted that Jacob Cornelisz.'s son, Dirk Jacobsz., died in 1567 at the age of 70, thus suggesting a marriage date for the older artist of about 1496 and ultimately a birth date of *circa* 1470². Archival evidence attests to the measure of his success and comfortable circumstances: by 1520 Jacob Cornelisz. owned a house called "*Het Lelick Aengesicht*" ("Ugly Face") in the prestigious Kalverstraat (no. 62); on April 18, 1520 he purchased a second house in the Kalverstraat (no. 60); and the inventory of his estate dated October 18, 1533 confirms that the artist died "*in groote ouderdom*" (as a man of means)³.

None of the four works Van Mander described in his 1604 account have survived, and the initial compilation of his *oeuvre* took place on the basis of his series of monogrammed woodcuts, the earliest of which are contemporaneous with the *Crucifixion*⁴. While contemporary sources are silent about the identity of Jacob Cornelisz.'s teacher, the stylistic evidence of his earliest known painted works, which also date from 1507, strongly suggest his exposure to proponents of the Haarlem school, particularly Geertgen tot Sint Jans, through the work of an intermediary master

¹ Carel van Mander, *Het Schilder -boek*, Antwerp, 1604, 1. 207 r-v. Van Mander identifies Jacob Cornelisz.'s brother as Cornelis Buys, an artist active in Alkmaar who is sometimes equated with the Master of Alkmaar.

² Max J. Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, XII, second. edition, Leiden and Brussels, 1975, p. 53.

³ Aldus Kurt Sreinbart, *Die Tafelgemalde des Jacob Cornelisz. von Amsterdam*, Serassburg, 1922, p. 2; J. Six, *Oud Holland 1896*, p. 96.

⁴ Francois Brulliot, *Dictionnaire des Monogrammes*, I, Munich, 1832, p. 19.

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such as the Master of the Figdor Deposition⁵. By 1512, both Jacob Cornelisz.'s son Dirck Jacobsz. and Jan van Scorel were assistants in his studio⁶. Entries in *the poorterboeck* of the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke for 1505, 1507, 1510 and 1516 list a "*Jacob van Amsterdam, scildere*" as a master with several assistants. It is tempting to associate the Amsterdam artist with a period of residency in Antwerp at this time because of the Mannerist elements in his work, particularly the highly ornamental headdresses. However, the sheer volume of his woodcuts in these years which are conspicuously signed with the arms of Amsterdam argues against it. Indeed, as Max J Friedlander noted, there is little evidence in his works from this period or later of the agitated forms which would support the likelihood of prolonged exposure to the Antwerp school⁷. Between 1512 and 1515, he designed windows for the choir of the Nieuwezijds chapel in Amsterdam as well as watercolour banners of the choir vaults.

While Jacob Cornelisz. doesn't emerge as one of the leading innovators of his time, he nevertheless remained receptive to change throughout his career. After his pupil Van Scorel returned to the north from Italy by 1524, Jacob Cornelisz.'s panels reflect the influence of Van Scorel's new outlook, particularly in his iconography and choice of subject matter. His *Saul and the Witch of Endor* (signed and dated 1526, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) was executed in this period. All of his surviving signed and dated works, including the striking *Self-Portrait* of 1533 (Amsterdam Rijksmuseum), appear after 1520. Perhaps Jacob Cornelisz. joined the ranks of his artistic contemporaries and made a sojourn south to Antwerp in 1521 at the time of Albrecht Durer's visit: according to the entry in Durer's diary for June 8, 1521 the German artist drew the portrait of a master Jacob before painting a small panel and giving it to the visitor⁸.

The *Crucifixion* has survived in splendid condition. It provides an important dated example from the little-known period of Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen's early works on panel. However, this work along with the woodcut series of *The Life of the Virgin* (dated 1507) and the *Noli me Tangere* (signed

⁵ Aldus Kurt Steinbart, 1922, p. 33.

⁶ Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen was van Scorers second teacher, after Cornelis Buys.

⁷ Decorative headdresses, for example, were consistent with the Mannerist style pervading both the Northern and Southern Netherlands at this time.

⁸ "*Item hob moister Jacob mit dem kobln conterfeit and ein tuffdein darzu machen Lassen, cost 6 stüber, and iber geschenct.*" quoted in Jane Louise Carroll, *The Paintings of Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen (1472? -1533)*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1987, p. 20.

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and dated 1507, Kassel), and *David and Abigail* (Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst) should be considered the product of a mature master who by that date had already reached the age of 37. Thus, until the middle of the first decade of the sixteenth century, Jacob Cornelisz. probably made his living primarily by exercising his skills in other media, such as woodcuts⁹. Both the *Crucifixion* and the *Noli me Tangere* are characterized by a lively and precise linear quality in the definition of their forms which points to graphic influences. The artist's concern for careful delineation of detail is readily apparent in the attention lavished upon expanses of brocade: the dresses worn by the Magdalene in the Kassel and New York panels appear virtually encrusted with the pattern constructed from black and gold. Both gowns, symbols of worldly splendor, incorporate the prominently displayed motif of three pomegranates. Compositionally, the *Crucifixion* is also consistent with other works from this period. Jacob Cornelisz. tended to stage his figure in the immediate foreground, while eschewing a concrete middle ground in favor of a landscape or architectural backdrop. His colouristic preferences before about 1510 tended toward deep saturated hues offset in prominent details of brighter tones.

Speculation about Jacob Cornelisz.'s training has emphasized the elements in his work which suggest the influence of the leading painter of the Haarlem school from the previous generation, namely Geertgen tot Sint Jans. The female figures found in the work of Jacob Cornelisz. are particularly reminiscent of Geertgen's manner, with their diminutive features, oval heads, broad high brows, pointed chins and gentle, expressive gestures. Jacob Cornelisz.'s exposure to Geertgen's style may have come through contact with one of his students, known as the Master of the Figdor Deposition after a panel in the Berlin Museum¹⁰. While Haarlem lies only about twelve miles west of Amsterdam, Friedlander proposes that the Figdor Master could have transmitted Geertgen's style to Amsterdam when he moved there¹¹. Both Steinbart and Carroll have argued the Figdor Master influenced the work of Jacob Cornelisz., and a comparison of the *Crucifixion* and a panel of the same subject in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam by the Figdor Master supports this assessment (fig. 1). In both panels, the tall central cross situated at the confluence of two hillocks divides the mourners into separate groups, with the lamenting Magdalene at its base. The slender figures of Christ, head resting

⁹ Max J. Friedlander, XII, 1975, p. 58.

¹⁰ Kurt Aldus Steinhart, 1922, p. 56; Jane Louise Carroll, 1987, pp.10-12.

¹¹ Max J. Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish Painting, V*, second edition, Leiden and Brussels, 1969, p. 34.

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on his right shoulder, are similar, as are the fluttering angels. Even Jacob Cornelisz.'s jaunty centurion with his twisting tricolour plumes suggests that the Figdor Master's composition was not unknown to him. In addition, both masters employ the device of a smooth architectural screen in their depiction of the Crucifixion.



Fig. 1: Master of The Figdor Deposition Crucifixion, oil on panel, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Despite such stylistic and compositional affinities with the older master, our panel attests to Jacob Cornelisz.'s incorporation of the current taste for late Gothic or Mannerist styles. The *Crucifixion* emphasizes highly decorative aspects such as the cascading hair and the costume — particularly the Magdalene's bonnet - which become progressively more fanciful over the course of his career.

Without adopting the extreme poses characteristic of the Antwerp school, he nevertheless imbues the figures with a greater solidity and movement than his predecessor. The stocky, broad-featured male observers in our painting are consistent with Rhenish types, for which the oeuvre of the Master

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of the Bartholomew Altarpiece (Utrecht circa 1440 - 1450, active there until 1500) may have been a source¹².

Jacob Cornelisz. executed three other related scenes of the *Crucifixion*. In an undated woodcut that only exists in a single impression, *Christ on the Cross between Two Thieves* (Stuttgart), he turns again to the central motif of the tall cross and kneeling Magdalene¹³. By circa 1510, his style had moved further away from the calm monumentality in the present *Crucifixion* to embrace the complexities offered by the historiated Calvary. In a more elaborate version of our composition (fig. 2) the principal participants appears with an even greater emphasis on ornamentation evident in the painstaking elaboration of their costume, and amid an equally lush landscape¹⁴. Like the 1507 composition, the figures occupy the immediate foreground. However, while the emphasis on variegated detail and texture continues in another *Crucifixion* of circa 1510 (fig. 3), the figures have assumed more elongated proportions characteristic of his panels from the second decade. The flurry of activities is underscored by the application of varied colour through the scene, which emphasizes the episodes of Christ's life simultaneously¹⁵. Jacob Cornelisz.'s simple and contemplative final treatment of the *Crucifixion* about ten years later (Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten) offers a marked contrast to his earlier approach¹⁶.

¹² Jane Louise Carroll, 1987, pp. 11-13.

¹³ F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700*, V, Amsterdam, p. 13, no. 82.

¹⁴ Reproduced in Reinhold Baumstark, *Masterpieces from the Collection of the Princes of Liechtenstein*, New York, 1983, no. 29. See also Max J. Friedlander, XII, 1975, who considers it among the workshop panels related to the Rijksmuseum composition, while conceding that it is "probably after all an original," p.117. Carroll attributes the Vaduz *Crucifixion* to a pupil of Jacob Cornelisz. whom she designates Hand A; Carroll, 1987, p. 175, no. 2.

¹⁵ As "attributed to Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen," in Pieter J. J. van Thiel, et A., *All the Paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, 1976, p. 177, no. A 1967. Two workshop panels are associated with the Rijksmuseum *Crucifixion*: Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, England and the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

¹⁶ W. Laureyssens, "Jacob Cornelisz. van Amsterdam (ca. 1470-1533) *De Calvarie*," *Openbaar Kunstbezit in Vlaanderen*, 1967, pp. 24a-2.4b.

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Fig. 2: Jacob van Oostsanen, *Crucifixion*, The Princely Collection Liechtenstein, Vaduz.

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Fig. 3: Jacob van Oostsanen, *Crucifixion*, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

The *Crucifixion* formed the central panel of a now dismembered winged altarpiece of a type which enjoyed widespread popularity at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Jacob Cornelisz.'s patrons were wealthy conservative Catholic members of Amsterdam's ruling elite, eager to outfit the city's numerous churches with material evidence of their devotion¹⁷. In order to elicit the viewer's empathetic response, the *Crucifixion* is presented in a narrative manner in which the slumped figure of the Virgin and ardent grief shown by the Magdalene are intended to indicate the appropriate corresponding response to Christ's sacrifice by the observer. The effectiveness of their demonstration is enhanced by the proximity of the figures to the foreground plane. In addition, the angels collecting the blood flowing from Christ's wounds in our panel emphasize the Eucharistic allusions of the scene.

¹⁷ Jane Louis Carroll, 1987, p. 6.

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Although it is difficult to determine the original format of the triptych, the wings may well have included portraits of the donors. Indeed, in keeping with his reputation in this area, many of the extant altarpieces and single panels by Jacob Cornelisz. do contain portraits. Two fragments depicting male and female donor groups from altarpieces by Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen in which the center panels are missing (both currently displayed in Amsterdam, Historisch Museum) suggest the format of the wings for the triptych which originally included this *Crucifixion*. The central scene for the fragment containing the male member of the Elbertsz family may have been a similar *Crucifixion*, as implied by the section of drapery visible on the right side of the fragment, which matches the distinctive red brocade gown with striped lining and blue underskirt worn by the Magdalene in our panel.¹⁸

This essay by Anne Woollett (1994) appeared in the exhibition catalogue, Otto Naumann Ltd., *Inaugural Exhibition of Old Master Paintings*, New York, 1995.

¹⁸ *All the paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam*, 1976, p. 177, C1125, iii.