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LOT 3

PROPERTY OF A PRIVATE COLLECTOR, NEW YORK

JOACHIM ANTHONISZ. WTEWAEL

UTRECHT 1566 - 1638

SINE CERERE ET BACCHO FRIGET VENUS

inscribed with a lot number lower right 69 (see provenance)

oval, oil on copper

4 1/8 by 3 3/8 in.; 10.5 by 8.6 cm.

ESTIMATE 300,000-400,000 USD

Lot Sold: 1,161,000 USD

PROVENANCE

Anonymous sale, Amsterdam, September 17, 1766, lot 69, the lot number inscribed in white paint in the lower right, for 50 florins (there described as 'De Alliantie of Vereeniging van Bacchus en Ceres, zonder welken Venus kwynt; de Liefde is het eindooogmerk dezer Vereeniging; het Stukje is in 't ovaal en zeer uitvoerig ope koper geschildert, door Joachim Wittewaal; hoog 4, breed 3 1/2 duimen);

Possibly Diderick, Baron van Leyden;

By whom sold, Amsterdam, Philippe van der Schley, May 13, 1811, lot 22 ('Bacchus, Venus en Ceres, verzeld van Cupido. Zeer uitvoerig geschilderd. Hoog 4, breed 3, 1/2 duimen. Koper, ovaal.')

Acquired by a member of the present owner's family in the early 1950s;

Thence by descent in the family.

LITERATURE

A.W. Lowenthal, Joachim Wtewael and Dutch Mannerism, Doornspijk 1986, p. 216.

CATALOGUE NOTE

This remarkably refined and beautifully preserved copper is an important addition to the oeuvre of Joachim Wtewael. Although it was not known by Lowenthal when she published her catalogue raisonné of the artist in 1986, it can now be identified with the painting of *Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus* sold in Amsterdam in 1766, which she cites in her 'Appendix C'.¹ That picture had been tentatively identified with another small oval on copper, which was sold in these rooms on June 3, 1988, lot 29, and again at Christie's, London, April 11, 2002, lot 576, as part of the Dreesman Collection (see fig. 1). However, the present painting has the number 69 painted in white in the lower right, which corresponds to the lot number in the 1766 auction, evidence that this, not the former Dreesman painting, is the work in question.

The subject *Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus* derives from a quotation from the Roman playwright Terence, from his comedy *The Eunuch*, of 161 BC. It can be literally translated as 'without Ceres and Bacchus Venus would freeze' or, more colloquially, 'without food and wine love grows cold'. Its appeal to the Dutch mannerist artists is obvious, allowing them to cloak an amorous subject in the respectability of classical literature. Hendrick Goltzius, Wtewael's slightly older contemporary and a frequent inspiration to him, depicted *Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus* in paintings, drawings and prints. However, apart from the former Dreesman painting, his only extant treatments of the subject are a series of three paintings of Ceres, Venus and Cupid, and Bacchus in the *Muzeul Brukenthal*, Sibiu (Lowenthal A-74, A-75 and A-76).²

Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus is, by contrast, a small composition on copper. Wtewael was known for his works in this medium and, already in his lifetime, the great Dutch biographer and art theoretician, Carel van Mander, praised Wtewael for his skill at creating compositions on a miniature scale as well as a grand.³ Until about 1610, the majority of Wtewael's paintings were cabinet pictures on copper. They fall into two major categories: the complex multi-figure works, which were often variations or reinterpretations of themes from larger compositions in other media, and paintings with only three or four figures, often shown in half or three-quarter length, such as the present work. Lowenthal has suggested that it was painted around 1600-05 for it shares characteristics of several other coppers of

that period.⁴ Perhaps closest is Mars, Venus and Cupid, in a private collection (Lowenthal A-19). Both are small, oval compositions of classical subjects with a small number of figures shown in three-quarter length. They reveal Wtewael at a time when he has moved from the extreme distortions of the Haarlem mannerist style, to a greater balance of elegance and clarity.

The figures fit perfectly into the oval format, their various outstretched arms echoing and balancing each other. Instead of showing Venus in classical robes (albeit quite scanty) as in Mars, Venus and Cupid, here Wtewael portrays her in contemporary dress. Because *Sine Cerere et Baccho Friget Venus* is in such good condition, we appreciate how refined Wtewael's technique is. He paints on the smallest details of hair, clothing and jewelry meticulously, so that the kernels of corn around Ceres' neck sparkle as much as Venus' pearls and the tiny bunch of grapes are bursting with juice.

We are grateful to Anne Lowenthal for confirming the attribution and her help in cataloguing this painting.

1 A.W. Lowenthal, Joachim Wtewael and Dutch Mannerism, Doornspijk 1986, p. 216.

2 A.W. Lowenthal, *Ibid.*, p. 156, suggests that the painting of Bacchus in Washington, DC (A-94), and Venus and Cupid in York (A-95) may have been part of a second set, but that the Ceres has yet to be found.

3 C. van Mander, *Het Schilderboeck*, Haarlem 1604, fols. 296v and 297r.

4 A.W. Lowenthal in conversation.

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