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Jan Boeckhorst

Portrait sketch of a young boy

JAN BOECKHORST
(Münster c. 1604 – 1668 Antwerp)

PORTRAIT SKETCH OF A YOUNG BOY

Oil on paper (?), laid down on canvas
45 x 30 cm; 17 ¾ x 11 ¾ in.

Provenance

Private Collection

Literature

Unpublished.



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Johann Boeckhorst occupies a distinctive place within the generation of painters shaped by the great Antwerp masters of the seventeenth century. Born in Germany, he moved to Antwerp around 1626 and developed within the artistic orbit of Jacob Jordaens, Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck.[1] Although documentary evidence for formal study under Rubens remains uncertain, Boeckhorst's close professional association with him is well established. By the early 1630s he had become a master in the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke, and he subsequently assisted Rubens with major decorative projects, including the Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi of 1635 and the mythological cycle commissioned by Philip IV for the Torre de la Parada.[2]

Boeckhorst travelled in Italy during the later 1630s, returning to Rome in 1639, and the experience broadened an already versatile practice encompassing history painting, allegory, portraiture, devotional subjects and designs for tapestries and prints. Collaboration remained central to his career. He contributed figures to works by artists such as Frans Snyders, who in turn supplied still-life elements for Boeckhorst's compositions, while documentary and stylistic evidence likewise points to close engagement with Van Dyck's art. Following Rubens's death in 1640, Boeckhorst is known to have completed or retouched works left unfinished in the master's studio.[3] His early figure types and compositions remain closely indebted to Rubens's late style, while from around 1650 a more pronounced Van Dyckian elegance enters his work. In the later decades of his career, Boeckhorst produced numerous altarpieces and large-scale religious compositions for churches and monasteries beyond Antwerp, alongside Old Testament and mythological subjects for private patrons.[4]

The present sketch is related to Boeckhorst's altarpiece The Triumph of the Eucharist in the Church of Saint Michael, Ghent, and more specifically appears to be a study for the boy at the lower left (fig. 1). Although in the finished altarpiece the boy's expression is less markedly pouting, his facial features, the angle of his head, his somewhat unruly hair and even the pattern of his jacket correspond closely to the present sketch. The brisk, confident handling evident in the present work may also be compared with Boeckhorst's sketch of a woman in profile in the Inchbald Collection, London; see M. Galen, Johann Boeckhorst. Gemälde und Zeichnungen (Hamburg, 2012), cat. no. Z13. Although the sketch has not been examined under laboratory conditions, it appears to have been extended along the left, right and upper

[1] Lahrkamp 1990, pp. 13-15.
[2] Vlieghe 1990, pp. 81-83.
[3] Vlieghe 1990, pp. 81-83.
[4] Vlieghe 1998, pp. 95-97.

edges, having probably been cut down at least on the right-hand side, around the boy's hair.

We are grateful to Dr Nico van Hout for first proposing the attribution of this vibrant sketch to Jan Boeckhorst, and to Prof. Hans Vlieghe and Dr Katlijne van der Stighelen for independently confirming the attribution.



Fig. 1. Jan Boeckhorst, *The Triumph of the Eucharist,* oil on canvas, Ghent, Church of Saint Michael.

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