

exhibited twenty-seven of the artist's paintings, one of the first recorded occasions of an exhibition devoted to the works of a single painter.

A factor in Dou's enduring fame must be the fascination for the products of extremely painstaking and skillful labor. The time that went into the creation of Dou's minutely detailed works is legendary: one anecdote relates how, when complimented on the patience with which he had painted a tiny broom the size of a fingernail, he replied that he still had three days' work to do on it. He is also said to have spent five days on the underpainting of a single hand in a portrait. Since he charged six guilders an hour for his services as a portrait painter, it is hardly surprising that these do not constitute a large proportion of his oeuvre.

Dou never married. He was buried in the Pieterskerk at Leiden on 9 February 1675. His pupils included Godfried Schalcken (1634–1706) and Frans van Mieris (1635–1681), as well as a number of less well-known painters, such as his nephew Domenicus van Tol (c. 1635–1676), Abraham de Pape (c. 1621–1666), Carel de Moor (1656–1738), and Godfried Matthijs Naiveu (1647–c. 1721).

Bibliography

Orlery 1641: 377, 380.
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Houbraken 1753, 2: 1–3.
Smith 1829–1842, 1 (1829): 1–47.
Martin 1902.
HdG 1907–1927, 1 (1907): 337–470.
Martin 1911.
Martin 1913.
London 1980.
Sumowski 1983, 1: 498–607; 5: 3088–3089.
Philadelphia 1984: 181–188.
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1960.6.8 (1560)

The Hermit

1670
Oil on oak, 46 x 34.5 (18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{5}{8}$)
Timken Collection

Inscriptions

On book strap: *GDou 1670* (GD in ligature)
On right page of book: *GDou* (GD in ligature)

Technical Notes: The original support is a vertically grained oak panel with an arched top. At a later date it was squared

off with a horizontally grained oak board attached with a half-lap join that overlaps the arched area on the back of the original panel. Both the original and extension panel are attached to a cradle.

Paint is applied over a smooth, thick white ground in successive thin layers with low brushmarking and transparent glazing. A broad, wide-aperture, drying craquelure, most prominent in dark passages where a black underpaint layer is found, is absent in the later addition where no original paint or ground is found. The black layer serves as a base for translucent shadows, and is found over underlayers in the hands, suggesting reworking by Dou. Other artist's changes visible in the x-radiograph and as pentimenti are the shifting of the arched ruin to the right and repositioning of the book, which tilted upward at the rear, perhaps held by the hermit.

An area of severe abrasion along the bottom edge has been repainted, and foliage from the later extension has been continued on the original panel. An aged varnish layer is present, covering remnants of earlier coatings and possible reglazed dark passages. No conservation work has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: Probably Kurfürst Karl Albrecht, Munich, by 1742. Kurfürstliche Galerie, Munich; Alte Pinakothek, Munich, by 1829; deaccessioned in 1927;¹ (Galerie van Diemen, New York and Berlin); William R. Timken [1866–1949], New York; by inheritance to Lillian S. Timken [d. 1959], New York.

WITH CLASPED HANDS resting on a well-thumbed page of the open Bible, an old hermit dressed in a Franciscan habit kneels before a crucifix. He is situated in an outdoor setting before a grotto-like edifice consisting of large brick arches. The book and crucifix lie on a large rock that is covered by a frayed cloth woven from brightly colored threads. At the base of the crucifix is a human skull and beside it an hourglass. The crucifix itself leans against a large wicker basket, which in turn rests against an old moss-covered tree stump that arches over the scene. The stump appears dead, although sprigs with green leaves emerge from its withered form. Hanging from the stump, above the crucifix, is a lantern, its door opened and the candle within it extinguished. In the foreground right grows a large thistle from the marshy soil. Lying on the ground is a waterpouch, an overturned earthenware jug, and the remains of a horse's skull.

The intensely spiritual gaze on the hermit's face and the fervor with which he clasps his hands as he stares toward the crucifix indicate that he is contemplating the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection. Dou has reinforced his message with reminders of the brevity of man's life: the skull, hourglass, and extinguished light of the lantern. He has alluded to the hermit's constancy in his devotions with the thistle, a common symbol for this virtue in Dutch painting.²

The tree has complex symbolic associations. As Kuretsky has argued, the dead tree in conjunction with the Crucifixion implies life through death.³ Traditionally the cross was believed to have been constructed of wood from either the Tree of Knowledge or the tree that grew from the seeds of the forbidden apple that sprouted from the skull of Adam. Only through Christ's sacrifice on the cross was it possible for man, through death, to gain everlasting life. The symbolism of life through death is reinforced by the living branches that sprout from the dead tree stump.

The basket against which the crucifix leans contains references to the life of Christ that can be understood through its appearance in another painting from Dou's workshop. In *An Artist in His Studio*, formerly attributed to Dou and dated 1635, the same basket, with its lid askew, appears in a scene of the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* that is shown on the aged artist's easel (fig. 1). Although the basket undoubtedly served as the baby's bed in this scene, it has been argued that, placed as it is in front of a low archway before a dark recess, the empty basket also prefigured Christ's empty tomb.⁴ Such religious symbolism for the basket is also appropriate in this painting, for it reinforces the central theme: the hermit's contemplation of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Fig. 1. Leiden school, detail of *An Artist in His Studio*, 1635, oil on panel, Milwaukee Art Museum



Dou painted this scene near the end of his life, but it was a subject that had occupied him throughout most of his career. Martin lists eleven hermit scenes that were painted between 1635 and 1670.⁵ Dendrochronological examination has revealed that Dou used a panel from a tree that had been felled in the early 1630s, a fact that may suggest he kept a supply of panels in his workshop.⁶ Too little information, however, is available about his working methods to be certain about the reason for the chronological gap between the felling date and the painting's execution. Many of the elements found in this painting occur in different combinations in other works, indicating that Dou must have owned these objects and painted them from life. The horse's skull bone, for example, also appears in *An Artist in His Studio* (fig. 1). The skull bone, as well as the water pouch and overturned jug presumably had specific allegorical meanings in his hermit scenes beyond their obvious generic ones, but they are presently unknown.

Dou's inspiration for his hermit scenes was probably a painting by Rembrandt of *St. Jerome in Prayer* that is known today only through an etching from 1631 by Joris van Vliet.⁷ Although Dou's hermit scenes contain many of the same objects found in this etching, he rarely painted attributes that could identify the figure as a specific saint. His intent was not to represent an actual moment from church history, but to suggest the virtue of the *vita contemplativa*. This subject is frequently alluded to in Dutch seventeenth-century portraits, still lifes, and genre scenes. In numerous paintings Dutch artists called the viewer's attention to the brevity of life and the importance of preparing oneself for the eventual Last Judgment. Although Dou's focus on the spiritual bond between a Franciscan hermit and the crucified Christ would seem to have Catholic overtones, he emphasized the importance of the written word in his scene, a significant component of Protestant belief, and it is unlikely the subject was viewed in specific denominational terms. That the Bible was of considerable importance to him is evident from the x-radiograph. Originally the Bible was turned in a different position as though the hermit supported it in his arms. The initial shape of the Bible is vaguely visible under the hermit's arm and can be further distinguished by a change in the crackle pattern on the present Bible.

The moralizing function of such a painting in Dutch society can be deduced from a work traditionally attributed to Dou in the Brooklyn Museum, the *Burgomaster Hasselaar and His Wife* (fig. 2).⁸ On the back wall of their home hangs a painting of a hermit that is similar in conception to *The Hermit*.



Gerard Dou, *The Hermit*, 1660.6.8



Fig. 2. Attributed to Gerard Dou, detail of *Burgomaster Hasselaar and His Wife*, c. 1635, oil on panel, Brooklyn Museum

The burgomaster, quill in hand, is seated before a table on which lie an open book and a globe. The woman rests her hand on an overturned lute. The objects on the table refer to the arts and letters, humanistic endeavors. The suspended glass sphere was metaphorically meant to represent heaven.⁹ The Brooklyn painting, therefore, can be interpreted to mean that humility and prayer, exemplified by the hermit, combined with intellectual endeavor are the means to transcend mortality. Only by balancing humanism with piety can one lead a full and truly virtuous Christian life.¹⁰

Much of Dou's fame as an artist derived from the exquisite refinement of his painting technique. This work is no exception. The care with which he has painted the hermit's features, hair, and beard, or the various threads of the woven cloth covering the rock is remarkable.

Notes

1. Before it was sold in 1927, *The Hermit* was part of the collection at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (inv. no. 399). It had been there since at least the mid-eighteenth century. On the back of the painting are two wax seals that were detached from the original panel when it was cradled and then reapplied. One of these seals is that of Kurfürst Karl Albrecht (1697–1745). According to Dr. Susan Neuburger (letter, 6 November 1981, in NGA curatorial files) this seal was used until 1742. The other seal may also be that of Karl Albrecht, or alternatively of Kurfürst Maximilian II Emmanuel (1662–1726). A painting by Dou sold at auction in Amsterdam in 1779 (May 19, no. 49), traditionally thought to be *The Hermit*, thus must have been another work.

2. For a discussion of the symbolism of the thistle, see De Jongh and Vinken 1961, 117–152; also Haverkamp-Begemann 1978, 1: 157, no. 83. The thistle can also relate to the crowning of thorns.

3. Kuretsky 1974, 571–580.

4. London 1980, 15–17. Dou used the basket motif in a complex vanitas painting where it had a comparable meaning, *A Vanitas Still Life with a Boy-Angel Blowing Bubbles*, c. 1635–1636 (National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, inv. no. P1981–1). See London 1980, cat. 3.

5. Martin 1913, 5–11, repro.

6. Letter from Peter Klein of the Ordinariat für Holzbiologie, Universität Hamburg, 28 January 1987, in NGA curatorial files. Klein has determined a felling date of 1633.

7. See Kuretsky 1974, 578.

8. While universally accepted as by Dou since first published by Smith 1829–1842, 9: 23, no. 76, the attribution of this picture has been rejected by Ronni Baer, who has kindly provided me with a draft of her entry on the painting for the forthcoming catalogue of paintings for the Brooklyn Museum.

9. De Jongh 1975–1976, 74.

10. I would like to credit Ronni Baer for this interpretation of the meaning of this theme for Dutch society. She worked on the painting as a research project when she was an intern at the National Gallery of Art. For her further thoughts on Dou, see Baer 1990.

References

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- 1902 Martin: 129, no. 132 (also 1908 ed.: 129, no. 132).
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- 1911 Martin: 164–165, no. 11.
- 1913 Martin: 6, repro.
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- 1980 London: nos. 2, 3.
- 1985 NGA: 134, repro.
- 1990 Baer: no. 121.