

1975 NGA: 208–209, repro.
1976 Walker: 286–287, repro.
1979–1992 Sumowski, 8 (1984): 4066, 4084.
1983 Sumowski, 3: 2019, 2021, 2022, 2094, cat. 1368,
color repro.

1984 Philadelphia: 241, note 2.
1984 Robinson: 540–544.
1985 NGA: 240, repro.

Gabriel Metsu

1629–1667

GABRIEL METSU was born in Leiden in January 1629, only two months before the death of his father, the Flemish painter Jacques Metsue. In 1644, at the age of fifteen, Gabriel Metsu is recorded as one of a group of artists who were lobbying for the establishment of a Leiden Guild of Saint Luke, and in 1648 he became a founder-member of the organization. With the exception of short absences in the early 1650s, he spent the next decade in Leiden.¹ By July 1657, however, he had moved to Amsterdam. On 12 April 1658 he married Isabella de Wolff, a relative of the Haarlem classicist painter Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600–1652/1653). In January of the next year, Metsu became a citizen of Amsterdam, where he died in 1667 at the age of only thirty-eight.

It has been assumed that Metsu must have studied with Gerard Dou (q.v.), Leiden's leading genre painter during the 1640s. This assumption may well be correct but is not without problems, given that early works from Metsu's Leiden period tend to be executed in a fairly broad and fluid manner, far removed from the meticulously crafted, small-scale paintings of Dou and the other Leiden *fijnschilders*. With the possible exception of the local painter Jan Steen (q.v.), Metsu, in fact, seems to have been influenced more by the Utrecht artists Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–c. 1660) and Nicolaus Knüpfer (c. 1603–1655). Interestingly, after moving to Amsterdam, Metsu's style demonstrates more of the high level of detail and finish associated with the Leiden school.

The influence of several other artists—notably Johannes Vermeer (q.v.), Gerard ter Borch (q.v.), and Pieter de Hooch (q.v.)—is sometimes very evident in Metsu's work. Despite the existence of a sizeable number of dated paintings, however, these influences occur without any clear chronological pattern, and it is difficult to establish a firm structure for Metsu's stylistic development.

Metsu's most widely acclaimed paintings are the elegant genre pictures, generally depicting a small number of relatively large figures within an upright composition. In addition to indoor genre scenes, he painted a few depictions of outdoor markets, religious scenes, portraits, and still lifes.

His only known pupil was the genre and portrait painter Michiel van Musscher (1645–1705).

Notes

1. While annotations in the guild book for 1650 and 1651 by Metsu's name state that he had left the city, subsequent documents confirm that this absence was of a short duration; see Robinson 1974, 12.

Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 3: 32, 40–42, 51, 211.
Smith 1829–1842, 4 (1833): 70–110; 9 (1842): 517.
HdG 1907–1927, 1 (1907): 253–335.
Leiden 1966.
Gudlaugsson 1968.
Robinson 1974.
Philadelphia 1984: 248–253.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 253–254.

1937.1.57 (57)

The Intruder

c. 1660
Oil on oak, 66.6 x 59.4 (26½ x 23¾)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

On the step to the bed beneath the white skirt of the central figure: *G. Metsu*

Technical Notes: The original support, an oak panel with vertical grain, has been thinned, backed, and cradled. An x-radiograph taken in 1940 shows the painting prior to cradling and suggests the panel is composed of a single board. Paint is applied smoothly over an off-white ground in a thin series of glazes in the darks and more thickly in the lights,

with small brushstrokes blended wet into wet and the highlights in low impasto. The upper layer of light-colored paint in the floorboards was deliberately scraped back in places to reveal the dark underlayer.

Infrared reflectography shows several pentimenti, some of which are visible with the naked eye. The proper right hand of the seated figure at left has been reworked, and the rear leg of her chair has been shortened. The chair at right was once wider to the left and the nearby pitcher was once squatter with a wider mouth. The vertical bed curtains at far left below the tassel were also adjusted. At high magnification preliminary drawing along the mouth of the pitcher and the proper right hand of the seated figure at left are visible.

Several areas of abrasion were extensively repainted in the past. Much of the repaint was removed during a 1986 conservation treatment. Remnants of old repainting remain over the green bed curtains, which are quite abraded, the dark chair cushions at right, and the white fur trim of the green jacket. The green jacket at left is somewhat abraded and the upper paint layer has blanched. An upper layer of glaze has also been abraded in the brown skirt of the maid in the right background. Original paint in the deeper shades of the red slippers and red clothing on the chair at right has blanched and the pigment altered to gray.¹

Provenance:² Colonel Gregory Holman Bromley Way [1766–1844], Denham Place, Buckinghamshire; John Smith, London, by 1830; George John Vernon, 5th Baron Vernon [1803–1866], Sudbury Hall, Derby, in 1830; (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 15 April 1831, no. 50); John Smith, London; Sir Charles Bagot [1781–1843], by 1833; (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 18 June 1836, no. 56); Albertus Brondgeest, The Hague, buying for Baron Johan Gijssberg Verstolk van Soelen [1776–1845], The Hague; (probably sale, The Hague, 29 June 1846); Thomas Baring [d. 1873], London, and Stratton Park, Hampshire;³ by inheritance to Thomas George Baring, 1st Earl of Northbrook [1826–1904], Stratton Park, Hampshire; by inheritance to Francis George Baring, 2nd Earl of Northbrook [1850–1929], Stratton Park, Hampshire; (Duveen Brothers, London and New York, by 1927); sold November 1927 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: *Exhibition of Works by the Ancient Masters*, British Institution, London, 1834, no. 103. *Art Treasures of the United Kingdom*, Museum of Ornamental Art, Manchester, 1857, no. 1059. *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School...*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1871, no. 211; (Winter Exhibition) London, 1889, no. 128. *Loan Collection of Pictures*, Corporation of London Art Gallery (Guildhall), London, 1895, no. 121. *Loan Exhibition of Pictures*, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1900, no. 47.

PERHAPS no Dutch artist was as facile with the brush as was Gabriel Metsu. His ability to capture ordinary moments of life with freshness and spontaneity was matched only by his ability to depict materials with an unerring truth to nature. These qualities were particularly admired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics, from Houbraken to Fromentin. In 1754, for example, Descamps, who

wrote with great admiration about Metsu's sense of design, softness of touch, and harmony of color, concluded by proposing, "Metzu comme le plus grand modèle qu'ait fourni la Hollande, à tous ceux qui voudront suivre ou imiter le même genre."⁴ By 1821 Metsu's art was so esteemed that it was said to have reached the level to which "de perfection l'art imitatif peut être porté."⁵ Thus it is of some consequence that in 1833, when John Smith described *The Intruder* in his catalogue of Metsu paintings, he termed it "a *chef d'oeuvre* of the master. The beauty of the composition, the elegance of the drawing, the delightful effect which pervades it, together with the colour, and accomplished execution, fully entitle it to this appellation."⁶

Smith's enthusiasm for this painting has been shared by all subsequent critics, and, indeed, *The Intruder* stands as one of Metsu's most finely wrought and carefully conceived works. Despite some losses in the glazes, all of the fluidity of his touch is evident in the array of fabrics and materials that give such luster to the image: the soft velvet of a morning jacket, the sheen of a silk skirt, the smoothness of carefully laid wooden floorboards, and glistening reflections on the pewter pitcher and candlestand. Moreover, in a painting that displays a wide range of human emotions, Metsu indicated the gestures and expressions of his figures with remarkable ease and naturalness.

All of these qualities show Metsu at his best and confirm the accolades that have always been accorded him. Nevertheless, truthfulness to nature, whether in the depiction of fabrics or human emotions, was merely incidental to the narrative he wanted to portray. For above all, Metsu was a storyteller. In painting after painting he sets up encounters between the sexes, in which individuals respond to interruptions or proposals, unimportant incidents that nevertheless elicit strong emotions. While his scenes often have an anecdotal character, they also appear to be true to life, particularly in that he does not always indicate just what the outcome of the scenario he portrays will be.

This painting is no exception. While the physical activities of the protagonists are clear, the particular set of circumstances that preceded the event and those that will follow are impossible to fathom. Just why has this handsome young officer burst into the room and which of the two comely young ladies has he come to visit? It is difficult to judge from his gaze. In any event, the woman at her toilet is clearly delighted to see him, and the maid, who gently restrains him, smiles at his impertinence with a good-natured expression. The young woman who

emerges from her bed, however, looks at him with undisguised disdain. To judge from the disarray of her clothes and the presence of her fur-lined red jacket and skirt thrown over the chair, she must have been lounging in bed and has quickly tried to dress after hearing the commotion at the door. Her relative undress, as well as the fact that she is putting her foot into her slipper as she clambers from the bed, adds a sexual overtone to the unexpected visit.⁷ The pewter pitcher and candle Metsu placed side by side on the floor in the immediate foreground may have a similar intent, for their shapes have sexual allusions that would have been understood as such by contemporary observers.

Metsu's painting had an afterlife that may help in an assessment of the character of his narrative. In 1675 Eglon van der Neer (1634–1703) painted *A Woman Washing Her Hands* (fig. 1) in which a suitor in the background is restrained by a maid in much the same way as in *The Intruder*. In this instance, the object of the suitor's attention is quite clearly the woman leaving the bed rather than the lady at her toilet. In contrast to Metsu's integrated composition,

no psychological connection exists between the foreground figures and the background scene. Indeed, Van der Neer apparently juxtaposed the two as thematic opposites rather than intending them to be an integrated narrative: in emblematic literature, handwashing was considered synonymous with purity, a virtue not to be expected from the sexual inclinations of the couple in the background.⁸ Metsu, in his more subtle composition, may have also incorporated a similar, although less extreme, contrast between domestic virtue and sensual pleasure. The woman at her toilet holds a comb in her hand, which, like the basin and ewer in Van der Neer's painting was symbolically related to moral cleanliness and purity in Dutch emblematic literature.⁹ It is thus not inconceivable that Metsu wanted to suggest in this work those spiritual and sensual choices that continually confront man in the course of his daily life. This interest in depicting individuals in the midst of a moral dilemma is found elsewhere in his oeuvre.¹⁰

Metsu was not only a keen observer of everyday life, but also of other artists' works; indeed, few other Dutch artists managed to forge their style from so many countervailing influences. During his early years he was influenced by the Utrecht artist Nicolaes Knüpfer (c. 1603–1655), whose history paintings and freely executed bordello scenes clearly appealed to him.¹¹ Elements of Dou's style and choice of subject matter also can be found in his work from this period. After Metsu moved from Leiden to Amsterdam in 1657, he responded to other artistic models as well: Nicolaes Maes (q.v.), Gerard ter Borch II (q.v.), Pieter de Hooch (q.v.), and, eventually, Johannes Vermeer (q.v.).

Although *The Intruder* is not dated, it was almost certainly executed around 1660 when the influences of De Hooch and Ter Borch were strongest.¹² From De Hooch, who moved to Amsterdam about 1660, Metsu gained an appreciation for the importance of establishing a structural framework for his scene through the spatial clarity of the room. Here, for example, the bond between the woman sitting at her toilet and the suitor is visually enhanced by the way each is enframed by an arch-shaped architectural component. Compositionally, Metsu has used the chair in the right foreground and the bright red robes thrown upon it as a means to separate the intruder from the women's space, which is defined by the clearly articulated floorboards in the foreground.

The nature of the narrative owes far more to Ter Borch than to De Hooch. The sexual innuendos associated with a suitor's visit was a theme Ter Borch

Fig. 1. Eglon van der Neer, *A Woman Washing Her Hands*, 1675, oil on panel, The Hague, Mauritshuis





Gabriel Metsu, *The Intruder*, 1665

explored in the late 1650s, in a painting also at the National Gallery of Art (1937.1.58), a work that Metsu certainly knew.¹³ Indeed, one can see enough subtle compositional and thematic reminders of *The Sutor's Visit* in this painting to suggest that Ter Borch's work served as a point of departure for Metsu. Metsu, however, opted for a more anecdotal approach than did Ter Borch: his narrative is more complex, and the gestures and expressions more specific to the situation described. This narrative style, which may well be an outgrowth of Metsu's early attraction to Knüpfer's overtly theatrical compositions, gives his work great sensual appeal, but at a cost. As in this painting, all too often the activities of the moment override the subtle nuances of psychological insight that are at the core of Ter Borch's greatest works.

Notes

1. Pigment analysis is available in the Scientific Research department (1 August 1986).
2. See Weale 1889, introduction, regarding the early provenance of this picture.
3. Thomas Baring jointly purchased the Verstolk Collection in 1846 with Chaplin, Milday, Humphrey, and Overstone. That same year he obtained the sole ownership of the painting from the joint purchase.
4. Descamps 1753–1763, 2: 240–241.
5. Josi 1821.
6. Smith 1829–1842, 4: 103. Smith knew the painting well, for he owned it for two brief periods of time between 1830 and 1833. See Provenance.
7. While it is a natural gesture, placing one's foot in a slipper often had sexual overtones in Dutch literary and pictorial traditions. See De Jongh in Amsterdam 1976, 245, 259–260.
8. See Amsterdam 1976, 195.
9. For a related emblem by Jacob Cats (*Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tijdt*, The Hague, 1632) Part 3, 147, emblem 45. See De Jongh in Amsterdam 1976, 197, repro. (in reverse).
10. See, for example, *The Hunter's Gift*, c. 1658–1660 (City

of Amsterdam, on loan to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. C177), discussed in Philadelphia 1984, 250–251.

11. See Wheelock 1976, 457–458.
12. This painting can be associated with a few other paintings that must date at about this time. Primary among them is the *Cello-Player* (Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace, London), in which a woman wears a costume identical to that worn by the woman leaving the bed. See Robinson 1974, 139, ill. 69. The same model wears the fur-lined jacket of the woman seated at the table in *Oyster Eaters* (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg). See Robinson 1974, 183, fig. 137.
13. Metsu quoted the figure of the suitor in Ter Borch's *The Sutor's Visit* in his own depiction of *The Visit*. Although Metsu's painting is now lost, the composition is known from an engraving by I. Ch. Lingée. See Robinson 1974, 182, fig. 136. A similar figure appears in *Visit to the Nursery*, 1661 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 17.190.20). See Robinson 1974, 178, fig. 130.

References

- 1829–1842 Smith, 4 (1833): 102–103, no. 94; 9 (1842): 524, no. 29.
- 1854–1857 Waagen, 2: 183.
- 1857 Thoré (Bürger): 275–276.
- 1860 Viardot: 155.
- 1860 Waagen, 1: 367.
- 1879 Crowe, 2: 399.
- 1889 Weale, 2: 55 no. 74, 202, repro. 30.
- 1907–1927 HdG, 1 (1907): 314–315, no. 190.
- 1909 Kronig: 213–224, repro.
- 1926 Collins Baker: 24, color repro.
- 1941 Duveen Brothers: no. 211, repro.
- 1941 NGA: 134, no. 57.
- 1949 Mellon: 90, no. 57, repro.
- 1963 Walker: 315, repro.
- 1965 NGA: 90, no. 57.
- 1968 NGA: 78, no. 57, repro.
- 1974 Robinson: 56–57, 67, 181, repro. 133.
- 1975 NGA: 232–233, no. 57, repro.
- 1975 Walker: 286, no. 379, repro.
- 1976 Amsterdam: 195, note 3.
- 1985 NGA: 268, repro.
- 1986 Sutton: 310, repro. 463.
- 1991 Ydema: 138, no. 129.

Michiel van Miereveld

1567–1641

MICHIEL VAN MIEREVELD (or Mierevelt) was born in Delft on 1 May 1567. His father, Jan Michelsz. van Miereveld (1528–1612), was a goldsmith. Although Michiel was to become one of Holland's leading exponents of formal portraiture during the first decades of the seventeenth century, his earliest training was as a history painter, working in the

international late mannerist style. Karel van Mander wrote that Miereveld's first teacher was Willem Willemsz. and that he then studied with "Augustijn at Delft" for about ten weeks before moving on at the age of about fourteen to the studio of Anthonis Blockland (1533/1534–1583) at Utrecht. There he remained for more than two years, and, following