
Title of Object

The Asparagus Vendor

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Pieter de Hooch

Country: Netherlands

Date of Object: 1675-1680

File Created: 9/1/2016

Accession Number: 82.46

Author of File: Lucy Hicks

Material/Medium: oil on canvas

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Paintings

Last Updated/Reviewed: 8/31/2017

Culture: Dutch

Tour Topics

Symbolism, cultural encounters, gender roles, landscape, modern life, symbolism, women, family/relationships, genre scene, daily life, status, wealth

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

What story do you think is being told here?

Take a close look at the people in the painting. Now describe the clothes you see the people wearing.

What about this painting looks like your home or what goes on in your home?

What items do you see in this painting that show this is a wealthy household?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

The Dutch India Company opened up trade routes with the Far East and with that came Asian products to buy so the merchant class could show off their new wealth. Note that every person in this work is doing something rather mundane, as this is a scene of daily life (known as a genre scene). Pieter de

Hooch is known for these genre scenes of domestic Dutch life. His work was admired for his “command of perspective and responsiveness to light and atmosphere.” (Sutton)

The orange or red robe, worn by the man, is not a color often found in Japan and is probably an under robe. This under robe would be worn with a much more elaborate outer kimono in Japan. “The under robe is called a Nagajuban (長襦袢) A kimono-shaped robe worn by both men and women beneath the main outer garment....While the most formal type of nagajuban are white, they are often as beautifully ornate and patterned as the outer kimono. Since men's kimono are usually fairly subdued in pattern and color, the nagajuban allows for discreetly wearing very striking designs and colors.” (Wikipedia)

The two women in the scene are not servants, but members of the family. Look closer to see that they are wearing pearls and are probably the wife and the elderly mother or mother-in-law, showing off their wealth but also involved in housework. They are being offered white asparagus, which was a delicacy.

The open footstools were precautions against the damp Dutch floors.

Artists during this time also painted both inside and outside in one painting, so we can see a little of the landscape outside the home. They could paint religious and secular subjects; they no longer needed to rely on the church for all their commissions. They painted everyday life and subjects doing everyday things. They experimented with more intense light and scale and balance, sharp diagonals and extreme foreshortening, identifiable sources of light, use of asymmetrical works and natural colors. The composition is such that it leads the eye throughout the painting, with a believable way to support weight of the figures.

There is a lot of imagery and symbolism. Valuable items in the home: birdcage, mirror, hanging picture, wardrobe, 2 porcelain bowls, and the globe.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

In the Dutch Republic, genre paintings were generally made for private wealthy patrons and depicted scenes of contemporary daily life. These were often filled with symbolic references, such as a clean house indicating a virtuous housewife and mother. The dog may be a symbol of fidelity. (Stokstad, pp. 751-752).

This painting was created during the Golden Age of Dutch painting. “Money and freedom. It’s an explosive combination that has often fueled creative booms, and in the 17th century it propelled the Netherlands to new artistic heights. With Catholic Spain embroiled in a religious war with Holland, many artists left the Spanish-run territories of the southern Netherlands (now Belgium) for that northern Protestant province, a haven of prosperity. Dutch maritime trading ships circled the globe, bringing unprecedented wealth to the small country, and artists thrived under the patronage of affluent, cosmopolitan clients. Golden Age artists generally favored secular scenes over religious imagery and often specialized in a particular subject, like portraits, landscapes, or still-lives. They could afford to—there was a market for every niche. But more versatile artists like Rembrandt succeeded in creating astonishingly powerful works in every genre.” (artsmia.org)

De Hooch (1629-1684) is from the Delft School of Painting (as was Johannes Vermeer) and this was painted towards the end of his life. He played a pioneering role in the Delft School and in the advancement of genre painting and naturalism in the seventeenth century. Best known for his expressive use of interior space and sun-filled courtyards, de Hooch's command of perspective and

responsiveness to light and atmosphere were unprecedented, and his work undoubtedly influenced his younger but more famous colleague Vermeer. Between about 1655 and 1662, De Hooch's work rose to the very highest level of achievement. Almost all of his paintings from these years depict interiors or courtyards containing just a few people, engaged either in domestic activities or in some restrained form of entertainment or merrymaking. The atmosphere in these works is characteristically calm, spacious, and airy, effects created through De Hooch's masterly control of light, color, and complex perspectival construction....In the 1660s, he began to paint for wealthier patrons in Amsterdam. By the end of the 1660s De Hooch's work had lost much of its delicacy and finesse. His later compositions became grander and more contrived, and his color harmonies and light effects harsher. His last dated painting is from 1684. (Sutton, Wikipedia, and NGA)

"A large facet of a genre scene's appeal was the opportunity it afforded to gaze into a private interior much like the one in which it might have hung and, in many cases, to identify with the values expressed by the subject. Paintings by Delft masters Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) and the less prolific but profoundly accomplished Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) exhibit compositional clarity, balance, and order, with painstakingly naturalistic lighting effects. They evoke a private world of quiet stillness, from a dozing maid (possibly intoxicated, as indicated by the wineglass nearby) or a young woman gazing out of a window, pitcher (a traditional symbol of purity) in hand, to an intimate scene of family life." (Genre Painting, Metmuseum)

"Founded in 1602, the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC) flourished and survived for two centuries. The company...traded both in Asia and between Asia and Europe. It was the first public company to issue negotiable shares and it developed into one of the biggest and most powerful trading and shipping concerns. The VOC ran its own shipyards, the largest being in Amsterdam. This spectacular trade with Asia made the Dutch Republic the world's key commercial hub.... In 1604, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) began trading in India. Along the coast from Surat to Calcutta, VOC factories and warehouses covered a far larger area than the company controlled in the East Indies archipelago. It was from the islands that the VOC obtained most of its spices: salt, pepper, nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon. India provided an ample supply of fabrics: silk and cotton. The finely decorated chintz (cotton) was especially popular in Europe, as was silk....Japanese produce included gold, silver, copper and porcelain. In Japan there was considerable demand for Indian silk. Silk, porcelain and tea were also traded in China. For a while, the VOC even traded in elephants in Asia. They were exported by the VOC from Ceylon (Sri Lanka)." (Rijksmuseum)

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Pieter de Hooch's clients preferred contemporary domestic scenes, which expressed the values of an increasingly prosperous Dutch middle class. In this picture, the family's wealth is reflected in several details. The mistress of the house, outfitted in fine fabrics and baroque pearls, welcomes a shopkeeper delivering fresh white asparagus—always a delicacy. She turns to speak to her husband, dressed in a rich red kimono—visual evidence of the Dutch East India Trading Company's access to Japanese culture. Note also the large kast, or wardrobe, draped with a sheet to protect the fine furniture from scratches.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Lucy's class notes

Various articles on Wikipedia: Kimono; Pieter de Hooch

Art History by Stokstad and Cothorn, 2014

Art Forms by Patrick Frank, 2006

Genre Painting in Northern Europe, Metropolitan Museum:

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gnrn/hd_gnrn.htm

Timeline of Dutch History, 1602 Trade with the East: VOC (Dutch East India Company), Rijksmuseum:

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/timeline-dutch-history/1602-trade-with-the-east-voc>

Pieter de Hooch, Artist bio, NGA: <https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/artist-info.1403.html>

Peter Sutton, Introduction to *Pieter de Hooch: 1629-1684*, Yale University Press, 1998.

Another painting by de Hooch, titled *The Fireside*, in the collection of the North Carolina Museum of Art, from 1670-1675, where you can see some of the similar “genre scene” features:



Image: http://ncartmuseum.org/art/detail/the_fireside