

David Teniers the Younger

Antwerp 1610 – 1690 Brussels

At the Dentist

Remnants of a signature lower left: D. Teniers

Oil on panel

35,5 x 29 cm.

Provenance:

Guéret, Musée Principale

Sale Berlin, Leo Spik, 26 May 1967, lot 202

France, private collection

Literature:

C. Laborde, *Musée de Guéret: guide du visiteur*, Guéret 1956, p. 43

F.E.M. de Maar, *Vijf eeuwen tandheelkunde in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse kunst*, Nieuwegein 1993, pp. 63-64, no. II, 21A

David Teniers the Younger has always been looked upon, rightly, as the most accomplished painter of the Flemish dynasty of painters. He was a prolific artist with over two thousand pictures attributed to him, of which many of the greatest works were completed in the period between 1640 and 1650. A century later, a number of his most decorative paintings were made into designs for tapestries manufactured in Brussels. The artist painted almost every genre of picture, though in much of his work he favoured the subject of peasant life. At the beginning of his career he was most influenced by his father David Teniers the Elder (1582-1649) and by the peasant painter, Adriaen Brouwer (1605/6-1638). In 1637, at the age of 27, David Teniers married Anna Brueghel, daughter and heiress of Jan Breughel I (1568-1625). A few years later, in 1644/45, when Teniers was elected dean of the Antwerp Guild, his fame was reaching its peak. During these years he enjoyed the patronage of the art lover and connoisseur, Antonius Triest, Bishop of Ghent (1577-1657). It was through him that, in 1647, Teniers' work came to the attention of the newly appointed governor of the Southern Netherlands, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria (1614-1662), who assigned him as court painter in 1650. His new role in these surroundings palpably influenced Teniers' choice of subject matter, as he began to paint mainly scenes of fashionable life.

Probably executed in the early 1640s, the present painting represents a seated dentist, who just removed some teeth. In his left hand he triumphantly displays one of them, while a young boy standing behind him, holding his cheek, is visibly suffering. The dentist's luxuriant fur coat

and fur hat are in strong contrast with the plain clothing of the patient. Teniers made several variations on the theme, which were often imitated by his contemporaries and later artists.¹ There was a tradition in Flemish painting of ridiculing quack doctors and their practices, and this may be the case here. Another version is in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden.² In the Dresden picture, which includes a lying dog in the foreground, the dentist wears a red coat and a feathered hat. The table as well as the tablecloth shows differences. We can assume that Teniers had to paint a second version for a commissioner. A further version with the subject, circa 1645-1650 and with an arched top, is in the collection of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Kassel. This work, in which a dentist has also just removed a tooth, was engraved by Raimondo della Croce. Underneath the print an inscription reads: 'The tooth apparently caused him much pain. When he saw that it had been removed, the patient regained his vitality. Evil engenders Good. The proverb is that after sadness follows happiness.' It is therefore debatable as to whether the painting is satirizing malpractice, or straightforwardly conveying the proverb of the print.

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Notes

- 1 E.g. Jacob de Hellemont-Zeger, *The Dentist*, oil on panel, 47.9 x 63.9 cm., Munich, Pinakothek, inv. no. 5149.
- 2 David Teniers, *The Dentist*, signed, oil on panel, 35 x 30.5 cm., Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. no. 1080.

