

PAN

AMSTERDAM

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



The Virgin and Child (1625 – 1635)

Signed in monogram Jv-B with the first two initials conjoined in the lower right
oil on panel

In a Dutch eighteenth century carved and gilded frame, the borders with scrolling acanthus leaves,
fruit, and griffins running from a sunspray top, flanked by cherubs down to a similar base
39 ½ x 30 ¾ inches (100 x 76.8 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Presumably European Art Market, circa 1870s

William Tilden Blodgett, New York, until 1876

Estate of the Late William Tilden Blodgett sale, Kurt's Art Gallery, New York, April 27, 1876, (as
Italian School, thought to be either lot 22 or 23)

H. B. Yotnakparian Art Gallery, New York where purchased by

Oliver Banks, New York, by 1982

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, New York, January 20, 1983, lot 10, illustrated (as Jan van Bijlert)

Lewis G. Nierman, Plantation, Florida, by 1983 (as Jan van Bijlert)

Otto Naumann, Ltd., New York, 1995 (as Jan van Bijlert)

Anonymous sale, Christie's, New York, May 15, 1996, lot 53, illustrated (as Jan van Bijlert)

Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, New York, 1996 (as Jan van Bijlert), from whom acquired by

Private Collection, New York, 1996 – 2013

Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, New York, 2013, (as Jan van Bijlert), where sold to

Private Collection, New Jersey, 2013 until the present time

LITERATURE

"Une vente à New York", in *L'Art, Revue Hebdomadaire Illustrée*, volume 2, 1876, pp. 191, 260-261, no. 5 (as Otto van Veen, an engraving of the painting is found between pp. 260 – 261)

Angel M. de Bareia, "Don Nicolás Martínez Valdivieso" in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, volume 20, Tip. De La Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas Museos, 1906, (as Otto Venius, from the collection of William T. Blodgett)

Alfred von Wurzbach, "Otto van Veen" in *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon: auf Grund archivalischer Forschungen bearbeitet*, Halm und Goldmann, Vienna, volume 2, 1906 – 1910, p. 744, (as Otto van Veen, from the collection of William T. Blodgett)

Elena Páez Rios, *Repertorio de grabados españoles en la Biblioteca Nacional*, volume 2, 1982, p. 191, no. 2 (as Otto van Venius, from the Collection of William T. Blodgett)

Paul Huys Janssen, *Jan van Bijlert (1597/98 – 1671) Schilder in Utrecht*, Proefschrift, Utrecht University, June 1994, pp. 77-78, no. 13 (as Jan van Bijlert)

Paul Huys Janssen, *Jan van Bijlert, Catalogue Raisonné*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Philadelphia, 1997, pp. 77, 98, 150, 239, no. 13., pl. 19, illustrated, fig. 24 engraving illustrated, (as Jan van Bijlert, with Lawrence Steigrad, New York)

Portraits and Recent Acquisitions, Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, New York, 2013, no. 3, illustrated (as Jan van Bijlert)

ENGRAVED

Nicolas Martínez y Valdivieso 1876 (as Otto Venius)

Jan van Bijlert (or Bylert) was the son of the glass painter Herman Beerntsz. van Bijlert. His initial training must have been with his father but later apprenticed with Abraham Bloemaert, probably from 1612 – 1613. Around 1617, he traveled to France and arrived in Italy by 1621. There he stayed mainly in Rome, where he became a member of the Schildersbent. It was also in Rome that he along with other fellow Utrecht artists came under the influence of Caravaggio. Van Bijlert returned home to Utrecht by 1624, and he along with this same group became known as the Utrecht Caravaggisti, having adopted the Master's style as their own.

Evident in *The Virgin and Child* are the Caravaggesque features that characterized Van Bijlert's early work. These included the use of dramatic chiaroscuro, the cutting off of the picture plane so that the image is viewed close-up and a striving to achieve realism over idealism. His range of

subjects were Biblical, historical, and genre as well as portraits. In 1630 Van Bijlert joined the Guild of St. Luke in Utrecht and from 1632 – 1636 served as its dean. His pupils included Ludolf de Jongh, Bertram de Fouchier, and Abraham Willaerts. In the 1660s Matthias Wytman was also a pupil. During the course of the painter's career several works were acquired by royal collections including those of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik, The Hague and the Winter King, Frederik of the Palantine in Rhenen by the early 1630s. Today the largest collection of Van Bijlert's paintings is in the Centraal Museum, Utrecht.[1] Other works can be found in museums throughout the world.

It is known that Van Bijlert painted the theme of the Virgin and Child four times and an expanded composition that included a young girl offering fruit twice. Paul Huys Janssen characterized this group as "among the most accomplished paintings in his oeuvre". From the four representing the Virgin and Child, three including ours are in private collections with the other in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. The Museum Brukenthal, Sibiu owns The Virgin and Child and a Girl Offering Fruit while the other is in a private collection. Of the group our painting is one of the earliest examples, thought to have been painted from 1625 – 1635.[2]

Mary directly engages the viewer while in the midst of fastening the Child's swaddling. The Child gazes adoringly at his Mother while grasping a nursing bottle that could double as a scepter, foreshadowing his future. The same bottle reappears in the artist's Fortune Teller with Young Couple in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The devices of the cascading curtain composed of baroque folds drawn aside to reveal a column are symbols of their majesty. Huys Janssen notes the "un-Dutch impression" of this group of works which over the years led to mistaken attributions to French or Flemish masters, as was the case with this painting when in 1876 it was engraved and published as a work by Otto van Veen (see *L'Art, Revue Hebdomadaire Illustrée*, op. cit.,).[3]

William Tilden Blodgett (1825 – 1875) moved to New York City in 1832. Along with his uncle William Tilden, Blodgett found prosperity in the varnish trade transforming a modest factory into one of the most profitable international companies in the United States. He further invested in real estate in Manhattan and Newport. Married to Abbie née Blake, their daughter Eleanor (b. 1855) would become the godmother to Franklin Delano Roosevelt owing to a friendship with Roosevelt's mother Sara.[4] An enthusiastic art collector, Blodgett served as The Metropolitan Museum of Art's first chairman of the executive committee as well as its first vice president. He was also responsible for the museum's initial purchase of 174 paintings, mainly Dutch and Flemish old masters, that was finalized in 1871. Well-traveled in Europe, Blodgett was viewed as a man "to whom nothing of inferior merit could be offered with any hope of success." At this time the only place to acquire old master paintings was in Europe, as there was no market in New York for anything other than contemporary American or European works. Although unknown, The Virgin and Child must have been purchased on one of Blodgett's European sojourns. Serendipitously Blodgett was in Paris during the summer of 1870 when France declared war on Prussia which presented him with the unique opportunity of buying in a virtually stagnant art market. Quick to take advantage of the situation, Blodgett aided in his acquisitions by the Parisian art dealers Leon Gauchez and Alexis Fevre as well as Etienne Le Roy of Brussels, was able to purchase 174 paintings for \$100,000 which formed the core of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection. Intended as a comprehensive overview of the period, the museum still retained 64 works from the original purchase when Katharine Baetjer's article on Blodgett's acquisition was published in 2004. Blodgett also possessed an impressive personal art collection housed at his home on Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street. He had intended to build a gallery onto his home, which at the time was just three blocks north of the Metropolitan Museum at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street, in all likelihood for public viewing. His death in 1875 put an end to these plans and his collection was sold at auction on April 27, 1876.[5] That night 93 paintings were sold for the impressive amount of \$87,145 in front of a packed audience in which all eligible seats had been reserved.[6]

[1] Biographical information taken from Paul Huys Janssen, 1997, op. cit., pp. 38, 40, 42 – 43, 50; and Paul Huys Janssen, "Jan (Hermansz.) van Bijlert" in *From Rembrandt to Vermeer, 17th-Century Dutch Artists*, The Grove Dictionary of Art, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 25 – 26.

[2] Paul Huys Janssen, 1997, op. cit., pp. 97 – 100.

[3] *Ibid*, pp. 97 – 98.

[4] Katharine Baetjer, "Buying Pictures for New York: The Founding Purchase of 1871" in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 39, 2004, p. 162; and Florence W. Asher, *Women, Wealth and Power: New York City 1860 – 1900*, Ph. D. dissertation, The City University of New York, 2006, p. 480, fn. 125.

[5] Baetjer, *op. cit.*, pp. 162 – 163, 182, 190.

[6] "A Feast for Art Lovers: Sale of the Blodgett Collection of Paintings" in *The New York Times*, April 28, 1876.