

PAN

AMSTERDAM

DOUWES FINE ART



"The Quacksalver", 1635

Etching; 7,8 x 3,7 cm, with small margins
signed and dated lower centre: 'Rembrandt. f. 1635'

Bartsch 129; White/Boon 129;
The New Hollstein Dutch 145 first and only state ;
Nowell-Usticke RR: "A very scarce, desirable little print" ;
Plate not in existence.

Provenance

Paul Mathey (1844-1929), Paris, verso mit dem Stempel (Lugt 2100b).

Private collection, Germany;

Karl & Faber, Munich

Private collection, The Netherlands;

Condition

A very fine impression of the only state of the popular sheet. With a fine margin around the platemark.

Notes

Initially, Rembrandt was fascinated above all by beggars and wretches. Later, he also developed an interest in other colourful city folk, which he usually depicted in the same smaller format. In this print Rembrandt van Rijn makes fun of a man flamboyantly dressed in clothes from an earlier era.

The figure wears an elaborate costume of a ruffled collar, fur cloak, knee breeches and a small codpiece and carries a large purse and sword on his right hip. In his left hand he holds up a small object for the perusal of passersby. The man is a quacksalver, depicted hawking his medicines in the streets.

Adam Bartsch (1757-1821), the great expert on prints at the Imperial Court in Vienna, described this etching by Rembrandt as follows: "A tiny piece, engraved with energy and lightness of touch. Its subject is a medicine vendor ("charlatan"), directed towards the right of the print. He holds a basket in front of him, from which he has pulled a packet of drugs that he shows with his left hand. His right hand is placed on his hip, and below hang a shoulder-bag and a sabre. His knees are slightly bent."

Since Bartsch was closer to Rembrandt in time than we are, it seems worthwhile to accept his identification of the subject as a man holding up a piece of paper in which a medicinal powder, or perhaps a solid medicine compacted like toffee, is wrapped for sale to passers-by. Rembrandt lived in Amsterdam, having moved there from Leiden only three years previously, so the man portrayed probably sold medicines on the streets of Amsterdam. After a long period standing up and trying to engage the public, no wonder he wearily bends his knees. Bartsch calls him "un charlatan", which means someone who speaks out loud the virtues of his wares: Rembrandt depicts him open-mouthed in order to record the impression of the sound as well as the actual sight of this outlandish character.