



EMANUEL DE WITTE
(Alkmaar circa 1616 - Amsterdam 1691/2)

"Interior of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, the transept seen from the south"

oil on canvas: 64 x 71,5 cm; signed 'E. De. Witte' (c.r.)



Provenance:

Abraham Dijkman, Amsterdam; his deceased sale, Amsterdam, de Bosch/ Yver, 17-18 July 1794, lot 47;
Sale, London, Foster, 25 March 1931 (as 'unknown'); acquired at the above sale by Asscher & Welker, London;
with D. Katz, Dieren; Dr. A. Welker, London, 1935;
with J.D. Klaasen Jr., Rotterdam; P.M. Kerdel, Scheveningen, 1963; with Hans Cramer, The Hague by 1990; from whom acquired by the former owner, a Dutch Foundation, in 1998.

Literature:

Noach, 'Het Material tot de Geschiedenis der Oude kerk te Amsterdam', Amsterdam 1937, p. 81;
E. Trautscholdt, in U. Thieme and F. Becker, 'Algemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler' Vol. 36, Leipzig 1947, p. 125;
I. Manke, 'Emanuel de Witte', Amsterdam 1963, p. 92, no. 62 with ill. fig. 31;
F. Duparc et al., 'Masterpieces of the Dutch Golden Age', exhibition catalogue, Atlanta 1985, p. 132-3, no. 60 with ill.;
H.R. Leppien, 'In Blickfeld: Holländische Kirchenbilder', exhibition catalogue, Hamburg 1995, pp. 56-7, 66-8, no. 20;
Kunst & Antiek journal, December 1997, p. 16;
Registered by RKD online (<https://rkd.nl/explore/images/216789>).

Exhibited:

Rotterdam, Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, 'Vermeer, oorsprong en invloed Fabritius, de Hooch, de Witte, 9 July - 9 October 1935, no. 116; Rotterdam, Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, Tentoonstelling van schilderijen, beeldhouwwerken en teekeningen uit particuliere verzamelingen in Nederland: onder auspiciën van de 'Stichting Museum Boymans', December 1939 - January 1940, no. 59; Atlanta, High Museum of Art, Masterpieces of the Dutch Golden Age, 24 September - 10 November 1985, no. 60, p. 132-3; Hamburg, Kunsthalle, In Blickfeld: Holländische Kirchenbilder, 1995/96, no. 20.

Notes:

De Witte spent his formative years in Alkmaar and Delft, and in the latter he explored numerous aspects of both the Oude Kerk (Old Church) and Nieuwe Kerk (New Church). By 1652 he had moved to Amsterdam and there he was deeply inspired by the interior of the Oude Kerk, in particular by the extraordinary effects of light achieved via its monumental windows, and it served as the subject for more than thirty of his paintings.



This work, painted in circa 1657-58, is a wonderfully atmospheric depiction of the northern transept taken from a viewpoint in the southern ambulatory. On the left a grave digger dressed in sober black subtly points towards the epitaph (or headstone) for Admiral Cornelis Johannesz. de Haan to be seen on the pier to the right. On the right, a distinguished gentleman in a bright red cloak (appearing on several of the artist's paintings) and a woman, both seen from the back, are looking at it too. In fact, De Witte made the epitaph the focus of attention by making all perspective lines disappear in the little skull underneath. Although the skull isn't present in the real-life version at the Oude Kerk, he made it the focus point of the canvas, as if creating a 'memento mori'. The woman who is suckling her child underneath the monument remembers us of the cycle of life: where life perishes, new life arises. It is very well possible that the client who ordered the painting was related to Admiral Cornelis Johannesz. de Haan, who died in 1633, and wanted to commemorate him.

Although he has constructed the painting using a limited palette of greys and browns, with just a single flash of colour in the gentleman's cloak; De Witte is able to achieve astonishing effects of filtered, reflected and refracted light which imbues the scene with a warmth and realism that does away with any need for a richer palette. While many other artists found the Oude Kerk's interior equally as inspiring, no one could reproduce it with such dramatic effects of light and colour, nor with such anecdotal charm.

De Witte is rightly acknowledged as one of the greatest architectural painters of the 17th century in Holland. All of his Amsterdam views were painted after his move there from Delft in the winter of 1651-2. His explorations of the effects of light advanced the art of architectural painting in Holland where previously the depiction of perspective and depth had been the principal concern. De Witte felt free to ignore the stringent requirements of linear perspective if they obstructed his creativity. Few details are known of his life, there being little documentary material to draw on, but he was certainly born in Alkmaar and joined the guild there in 1636. Six years later he joined the Delft guild of St. Luke and subsequently was married with two daughters.

Late in 1691 De Witte suddenly died.



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