



CATALOGUE ENTRY

Landscape with Hermit

early 1500s

Circle of Jan Wellens de Cock

Netherlandish, 1450–1527

oil on oak panel

19-1/4 × 10-1/2 in.

(49 × 26.6 cm)

The Clowes Collection

2017.84

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

None

Entry

¹ Craggy rocks, dark waters, raging fires, and buildings in ruination make up a violent world where people drown, ships sink, and the rebel angels fall. Witnessing the unraveling—earthly and unheavenly alike—a hermit kneels outside his shelter in the hollow of a dead tree. A small lantern hangs on the tree, but the dim light it offers only accentuates the darkness threatening to engulf the bleak place.

² A protagonist in the legend of St. Christopher, the hermit may well be an accessory to a scene of St. Christopher carrying the Christ child. As suggested by the Austrian art historian Gustav Glück, the oblong panel may have been a wing of a diptych or a triptych depicting the deed of the saint.¹ While Glück and Wilhelm Valentiner attributed this painting to Pieter Bruegel the Elder (about 1525–1569), citing its fine quality, A. Ian Fraser saw greater connections to the exterior of a triptych attributed to Jan Wellens de Cock in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 1).²



Figure 1: Attributed to Jan Wellens de Cock (Netherlandish, active by 1506, died before 1527), *Saint Christopher and the Christ Child on the Way of Life* (outside wings), about 1525, oil on panel, 16-17/32 × 6-39/64 (left panel), 16-17/32 × 6-1/2 (right panel). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-1598.

³ Evidence of De Cock's authorship is "disquietingly sparse," as Max J. Friedländer laments, which has become an often repeated phrase in reference to this painter.³ For a time, only one painting, a *St. Christopher Carrying the Infant Child*, formerly in the Baron Von Bissing Collection, Munich (fig. 2) was associated with this artist, based on an engraving replicating the painting and which is inscribed "pictum J Kock" (fig. 3). However, questions of the identity of this Kock/Cock remain.⁴



Figure 2: Jan Wellens de Cock (Netherlandish, active by 1506, died before 1527), *Saint Christopher Carrying the Infant Christ*, about 1520–1525, oil on oak panel, 14-1/16 × 18-5/64 in. Sold at Sotheby's, London, 8 December 2004, lot 7. © Sotheby's.



Figure 3: After Jan Wellens de Cock (Netherlandish, active by 1506, died before 1527), *St. Christopher and the Hermit*, engraving/etching on paper, 1506–1578, 10-13/64 × 12-33/64 in. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-1963-630.

4 While active in Antwerp in the early sixteen century, De Cock was deeply influenced by the Leiden master Cornelis Engebrechtsz. (about 1465–1527). De Cock might even have been a native of Leiden. A Jan de Cock registered apprentices in Antwerp in 1506 and again in 1516, leading Friedländer to speculate, based on extant historical records and his interest in distinguishing individual, stylistic differences, that he may have been identical with Jan van Leyen, a Leiden master who entered the Antwerp guild in 1503.⁵

5 The stylistic kinship between the two Leiden painters may be evidenced by two closely related paintings: the central panel of Engebrechtsz.'s (fig. 4) *Lamentation Triptych* in the Museum Lakenhal of Leiden and another work, the *Lamentation of Christ* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, which Friedländer considered to be by the hand of Jan de Cock, although today it is given to the circle around Engebrechtsz. (fig. 5).⁶ (The partially similar compositions of the two paintings point to a shared source, which, Friedländer suggested, could be a lost drawing by Engebrechtsz.⁷) Several elements in the Vienna *Lamentation* bring to mind either both the Von Bissing *St. Christopher* and the Clowes landscape. St. John's billowing, carapace-like mantle in the *Lamentation*, for instance, recalls St. Christopher's oversized, bell-shaped cape in the former, and the craggy outcropping at the extreme background is similar to that in the Clowes painting, which dominates the composition.



Figure 4: Cornelis Engebrechtsz. (Netherlandish, about 1465–1527), *Triptych Depicting the Lamentation of Christ with Founders and Saints, with the Saints Apollonia, Gertrudis van Nivelles, Agatha and Agnes on the outer panels*, about 1508–1510, oil on panel, center panel: 54-23/32 × 52-23/64 × 2-1/4 in., shutters: 54-23/32 × 26-7/64 × 2-1/4 in. Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden, Inv. S 94.



Figure 5: Master of the Vienna Lamentation, circle of Cornelis Engebrechtsz. (Netherlandish), *Lamentation of Christ*, about 1520, oil on oak panel, 17-23/32 × 13-25/32 in. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. 6441. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

6 When turning to conservation analysis of the Clowes painting, we learn that during a former restoration, likely in the early twentieth century, the painting was thinned and attached to a new panel, making the results of dendrochronological analysis speculative at best. What can be said with relative certainty is that the composition has not been cut down in any way; a barb is present indicating that it was painted in an engaged frame, likely part of a larger altarpiece. Today's renewed interest in the interaction between the Leiden and Antwerp painters of the early sixteenth century may yield additional results.

Author

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Provenance

(Alfred Strauss, with Jacob M. Heimann, Los Angeles) by 1949;⁸

G.H.A. Clowes, Indianapolis, in 1949;

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1958–2017, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (CI0013);

Given to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2017.

Exhibitions

John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, 1950, *Holbein and His Contemporaries*, no. 10;

John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, 1959, *Paintings from the Collection of George Henry Alexander Clowes: A Memorial Exhibition*, no. 11;

Indiana University Museum of Art, Bloomington, IN, 1963, *Northern European Painting—The Clowes Fund Collection*, no. 24.

References

Holbein and His Contemporaries, exh. cat. (Indianapolis, IN: John Herron Art Museum, 1950), no. 10;

Gustav Glück, "Peter Bruegel the Elder and the Legend of St. Christopher in Early Flemish Painting," *Art Quarterly* 13 (Winter 1950): 36–47, figs. 1–3;

Gustav Glück, *Das grosse Breugel-Werk* (Vienna: Schroll, 1953), 14, 35–36, cat. no. 2 and pl. 2;

Paintings from the Collection of George Henry Alexander Clowes: A Memorial Exhibition, exh. cat. (Indianapolis, IN: John Herron Art Museum, 1959), no. 11;

Northern European Painting—The Clowes Fund Collection, exh. cat. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Museum of Art, 1963), no. 24.

Piero Bianconi and Robert Hughes, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 87–88;

A. Ian Fraser, *A Catalogue of the Clowes Collection* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973), xli, 108–9.

Notes

1. Gustav Glück, "Peter Bruegel the Elder and the Legend of St. Christopher in Early Flemish Painting," *Art Quarterly* 13 (Winter 1950): 36–47; Gustav Glück, *Das grosse Breugel-Werk* (Vienna: Schroll, 1953), 35–36.
2. Statement by A. Ian Fraser, 18 August 1972, File CI0013, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
3. Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1974), 37.
4. Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1974), 37. Marc Rudolf De Vrij, *Jan Wellens de Cock: Antwerp Mannerist Associate* (Zwanenburg: M.R.V. Publishers, 2009). This painting was sold at Sotheby's, London, on 8 December 2004, lot no. 7. A closely related version of this painting was sold at Sotheby's, London, on 7 July 2021, lot no. 4; in the accompanying essay in the sale catalogue, a new theory was proposed by Jan Piet Filedt Kok, Suzanne Laemers, and Margreet Wolters, currently collaborating on a study of the subject of St. Christopher and the identity of this enigmatic painter. They suggested the term "Pseudo Jan Wellens de Cock" to describe a group of anonymous painters active in Antwerp and/or Leiden in the 1520s and 1530s. See <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/old-masters-evening-sale/saint-christopher-carrying-the-christ-child-in-an>.
5. Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Lucas van Leyden and Other Dutch Masters of His Time* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1973), 41–42, and Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1974), 37.
6. Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1974), 37. Also Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Lucas van Leyden and Other Dutch Masters of His Time* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1973), pls. 64–65.
7. Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1974), 40.
8. Bill of Sale, Strauss, with Heimann, to Clowes, 10 June 1949, File CI0013, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. The purchase of this painting by Clowes was in settlement of a lawsuit he had filed against Heimann. See Files: Chadbourne, Hunt, Jaeckel & Brown, New York, Correspondence Files, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.