



MARTEN VAN CLEVE the Elder

(1527 Antwerp 1581)

An Outdoor Wedding Dance.

Oil on panel.

77 x 107.5 cm.

Certificate: Dr. Klaus Ertz, 28.2.2020. Provenance: - Kunstsalon Karl Böhm, Vienna, 1938. - Since then in a Swiss private collection. On the outskirts of a village, a merry group of peasants has gathered to celebrate a wedding outdoors. The majority of the guests dance happily under the trees to bagpipe music, while others enjoy themselves at tables with food and drink. In the background a meal is being prepared in large cauldrons. The theme of the wedding dance was one of the most popular subjects in 16th-century Flemish painting. The inspiration

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for the composition offered here comes from the "Wedding Dance" by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c. 1525–1569), dated 1566, which is now in the Detroit Institute of Arts (inv. no. 30.374). The works of Marten van Cleve played a major role in the dissemination of the pictorial ideas of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564–1636). While Brueghel's portrayal of rural life visibly inspired Marten van Cleve, he created an independent composition here, as evidenced, among other things, by the signatures in our painting that are visible to the naked eye. Marten van Cleve painted several versions of this subject, which was very popular at the time. What is likely the first version was sold at Sotheby's London on 6 July 2016. Two other versions by van Cleve are known: one which was sold at Houthakker in Amsterdam in 1934, and a wedding dance offered at Sotheby's on 7 December 2016 (see Klaus Ertz and Christa Nitze-Ertz: Marten van Cleve 1524–1581, Lingen 2014, pp. 65 and 195, cat. no. 127). Marten van Cleve was a student of Frans Floris (c. 1516–1570) and initially specialized in landscape painting. Only later did he integrate figurative and historical themes as well as genre depictions into his oeuvre. Marten van Cleve became a member of the Antwerp Guild of St Luke in 1551 and taught painting to his four sons. In February 2020, following the publication of the auction catalogue, Dr Klaus Ertz was able to examine the painting itself and has identified it as an original work by the Flemish painter Marten van Cleve. Dr Ertz is furthermore convinced that the work offered here served as a model for this motif in the works of both Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel the Elder. One element which differs significantly from his contemporaries' versions is the positioning of the bride: instead of sitting at the wedding table as is customary, she is shown dancing in the middle ground.

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