

Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot

Dutch, 1586-1666

Soldiers in a Village

1644, oil on canvas, 68.0 x 99.5 cm

Purchased with assistance from Mr Adriaan and Mrs Gabriel Tasman 1996



About the work

This is a 17th century Dutch narrative painting. Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot depicts the main street of a typical Dutch village in which conquering soldiers herd the villagers from the small church in the left foreground or rest beside the loot they have gathered.

Incidents like this occurred during the series of wars in Europe lasting from 1618 to 1648, known as The Thirty Years War. In 1644, when this work was painted, the war was still having an effect on much of continental Europe. Peasant villagers were often driven from their homes and had their livestock and possessions confiscated by raiding mercenary soldiers and cavalymen. The conflict between the French monarchy and the Hapsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire was over the political domination of central Europe and the war had spread to the Netherlands. Such scenes as this were common throughout the Low Countries.

Despite the subject matter and the considerable anguish the villagers would have been feeling at the time, Droochsloot has created a calm and orderly scene. It is painted in a careful, traditional oil technique, using successive thin transparent layers of paint, that allows the artist to depict considerable detail of the figures, buildings and the landscape. This delight in the surface and textural details of the forms is a very typical Northern style.

The scene follows what had become a very common style of placing the major landmarks in alternate left/right positions along the recession plane. The sense of space and distance is achieved by the converging buildings, as the eye follows the main street back into the picture, and by the overlapping forms. There is an awkwardness, however, in the differing sizes and actions of the varied groups, suggesting that Droochsloot may have copied the figures from previous sketches or earlier paintings.

The narrative style could be said to be based on the history painting tradition but also on Dutch genre and townscape paintings. Droochsloot was probably influenced by the leading painters of the Utrecht school, such as Abraham Bloemaert (1564 -1651) and Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588 -1629), and by the graphic works of Albrecht Dürer (1471 -1528).

Droochsloot painted a number of works similar to *Soldiers in a Village*. One, closely related to this and painted in 1645, is in the Louvre's collection in Paris. *Soldiers in a Village* was originally in the collection of the art dealer and framer McGregor Wright, who gifted it to the Christchurch Technical Institute (now Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) in 1935. It was offered for sale in 1995 and the following year was presented to the Christchurch Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu in the name of Mr Adriaan and Mrs Gabrielle Tasman.

Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot

Dutch, 1586-1666

About the artist

Droochsloot was born in 1586 but little is known of him. He was active in Utrecht from 1616 to 1660 and admitted to the Artists' Guild of St Luke in 1616 at the age of 40. He was the Guild's dean from 1623 to 1624.

Droochsloot became highly regarded as a painter of landscapes, historical subjects and genre scenes of village life.

Worcester Boulevard, PO Box 2626, Christchurch, New Zealand
www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz Phone (03) 941 7300

