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Charity begins at home: National Gallery of Art acquires Ochtervelt genre painting

The Dutch picture depicts a wealthy burgher's child dispensing alms to a beggar boy and sold for a record \$4.4m at auction last year

by PAUL JEROMACK | 16 October 2015



Jacob Ochtervelt

A Nurse and a Child in the Foyer of an Elegant Townhouse, 1663

oil on canvas

32 x 26 1/4 in. (81.5 x 66.8 cm)

National Gallery of Art, Washington

The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund

The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, has acquired a recently rediscovered genre painting by the Dutch Old Master Jacob Ochtervelt, *A Nurse and a Child in the Foyer of an Elegant Townhouse* (1663). The work was bought by the London dealer Johnny van Haefen at Sotheby's New York for a record \$4.4m in January 2014, and two months later he offered it at the Tefaf fair in Maastricht for \$7.5m. Sources in the trade say the National Gallery paid a little more than \$5m for the work; the museum does not comment on the value of works of art, but a statement says the acquisition was made through "the generous support of The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund".



Jacob Ochtervelt, *A Nurse and a Child in the Foyer of an Elegant Townhouse*, 1663

Ochtervelt's painting depicts a child as a personification of charity. Standing in the entrance hall of an upper-class Dutch townhouse, guided by his nurse, a little boy dressed in a spotless white skirt (typical attire for both the youngest sons and daughters of wealthy burghers) drops a coin in the hat of a beggar boy in tattered rags, his mother looking on as she nurses a newborn infant. In the next room, the alms-dispensing boy's parents look out at the viewer as if to say: "This is the proper way to raise a child."

Since Ochtervelt's work is not frequently encountered in public collections, he is much less-known than his contemporaries. This piece "complements one of the great strengths of the Gallery's collection: the Dutch painters of high-life genre scenes in the 1650s and

1660s, among them Johannes Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, Gerard ter Borch, and Gabriel Metsu," says the museum's director Earl A. Powell III in a statement. "Each of these artists capture quiet moments of daily life that entrance and engage viewers, not only because of the sensitivity of their depictions of the human figure but also because of the way they capture the effects of light and color, and the sheen of fabrics."

The picture had gone untraced since its appearance in an 1860 Paris estate sale, where it was offered for 610 francs. It surfaced at Sotheby's New York in January 2014, consigned by a private owner who acquired it around 1982, and was bought by van Haefen for \$4,421,000, a record for the artist.