

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



A Boy Blowing up a Bladder

indistinctly signed with his initials JvS in the lower right
oil on canvas
23.62 x 19.1 inches (60 x 48.5 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Sir Abraham Hume (1749 – 1838) circa 1820, and by descent to his grandson

John Hume Egerton, Viscount Alford (1812 – 1851), and by descent to his son

Adelbert Wellington Brownlow Cust, 3rd Earl Brownlow (1844 – 1921)

The Property of the RT. Hon. Lord Brownlow removed from Belton House, Grantham, Important Pictures by Old Masters, Christie's, London,
May 3, 1929, lot 6 (as by Frans Hals) where purchased by

Smith

Frank T. Sabin, London, by 1931

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, April 14, 1944, lot 88, (as by Jan Miense Molenaer) where sold to

West

Galerie Frederike Pallamar, Vienna by 1968

EXHIBITED

London, British Institution, Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, 1828, no. 97 (as by Frans Hals, on loan from Sir A. Hume)

New York, F. Kleinberger Galleries, Exhibition of Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, Assembled by the College Art Association with the Aid of Dr. W. R. Valentiner, October 24 – November 5, 1931 (as by Jan Mienze Molenaer, on loan from Frank Sabin, London)

Detroit, Michigan, Detroit Institute of Arts, Exhibition of Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century Assembled by the College Art Association with the Aid of Dr. W. R. Valentiner, November 15 – 28, 1931 (as by Jan Mienze Molenaer, on loan from Frank Sabin, London) and traveling to Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, December 7, 1931 – January 7, 1932; City Art Museum of St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri, January 15 – February 14, 1932; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, February 22 – March 19, 1932; Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio, March 28 – April 23, 1932; and Germanic Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 2 – May 28, 1932

Innsbruck, Austria, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Niederländische Gemälde in Tiroler Besitz, May 10 – June 9, 1968, no. 21 (as by Jan Miense Molenaer)

LITERATURE

Sir Abraham Hume, Catalogue of Sir Abraham Hume's Collection of Pictures, circa 1820, unpaginated, (as by F. Hals, "a boy blowing a bladder ... a spirited study of the master")

Sir Abraham Hume, A Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of Pictures Comprehending Specimens of all the Various Schools of Painting, W. Nicol, London, 1824, p. vi, no. 127 (as by F. Hals)

"Catalogue of Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish and Dutch Masters with which the proprietors have favoured the Institution, British Institution, London, 1828, unpaginated, no. 15, no. 97 (as by Frans Hals, on loan from Sir A. Hume)

Algernon Graves, A Century of Loan Exhibitions, volume II, London, 1913, p. 479, under 1828, no. 97, (as by Frans Hals, on loan from Sir A. Hume)

"The Brownlow Sale" in The Connoisseur, volume LXXXIII, no. 333, London, May 1929, p. 382 (as by Frans Hals)

"A Comedy for Connoisseurs" in The Literary Digest, Funk & Wagnalls Company Publishers, New York, volume 10, May 18, 1929, p. 28 (as by Frans Hals)

Art Prices Current, Wm. Dawson & Sons Limited, 1929, p. 385 (as by Frans Hals)

"Report of Auction Sales, Paintings by Old Masters" in International Studio, volume XCIII, International Studio, Inc., New York, 1929, p. 78 (as by Frans Hals)

Exhibition of Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, Assembled by the College Art Association with the Aid of Dr. W. R. Valentiner, F. Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1931, Introduction and entry, unpaginated, (as by Jan Mienze Molenaer, signed with initials J. M. f., and on loan from Frank Sabin, London)

Exhibition of Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, Assembled by the College Art Association with the Aid of Dr. W. R. Valentiner, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan and traveling to 5 American museums, 1931, Introduction and entry, unpaginated (as by Jan Mienze Molenaer, signed with initials. J. M. f., on loan from Frank Sabin, London)

News – Record of the Baltimore Museum of Art, volume 4, no. 3, February 1932, unpaginated, illustrated (as Jan Molenaer)

Art Institute News, Bulletin of the Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio, volume 4, no. 7, April 1932, unpaginated, illustrated (as by Jan Mienze Molenaer)

A Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of twenty – six paintings by Dutch and Flemish XVIIth Masters, Frank T. Sabin, London, Autumn 1934, no. 9, illustrated (as signed J. v. S.)

Apollo, May – June 1944, p. 168 (as by J. M. Molenaer)

The Year's Art, volume 64, Macmillan and Co., London, 1945, p. 107 (as by J. M. Molenaer)

Niederländische Gemälde in Tiroler Besitz, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, Austria, 1968, pp. 33 – 34, no. 21, illustrated (as by Jan Miense Molenaer, and indistinctly signed and dated 1665 [?])

Rudolf Pallamar, Katalog der 18. Ausstellung in Wien, Galerie Friederike Pallamar, Kunsthandel, November 18 – December 31, 1968, pp. 105 – 106, illustrated (as by Jan Miense Molenaer, and indistinctly signed)

E. Benezit, "Frans Hals le vieux" in Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs, volume 5, Librairie Gründ, Paris, 1976, p. 372 (as by Frans Hals)

We would like to thank Dr. Fred G. Meijer for identifying the monogram on this painting as that of Juriaan van Streek on the basis of photographs from the 1930s and dating it as an early work by the artist to around the mid-1650s.

In this striking image a young boy wearing a fur-trimmed red cap is blowing up a pig's bladder. This was a toy for boys made by blowing air through a hollow straw into the bladder. It could be used as a ball or a balloon. Dried beans or small stones might be added to make it rattle or alternatively filled with water and thrown at a friend or foe. If left untied it could produce rude sounds when squeezed. In art it symbolized the fleeting nature of pleasure and the transitoriness of life.[1]

The painting has a storied history. Its earliest known provenance is in the collection of the British aristocrat Sir Abraham Hume. Hume came from a family that acquired their fortune through the East India Company. Where and when Hume purchased *A Boy Blowing up a Bladder* is unknown. Perhaps it was on a buying trip to the continent where he added a star to his collection Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) sometime around 1814.[2] In any case circa 1820 it was published in a book on Hume's collection where it was described as by Frans Hals and "a spirited study of the master". In 1828 it was included in the exhibition, *Fine Arts in the United Kingdom*, as by Frans Hals held at the British Institution. After Hume's death in 1838 it descended in his family until 1929 when Lord Brownlow sold it at Christie's where it was again acknowledged as by Frans Hals. By 1931 it was owned by the London dealer Frank T. Sabin, who loaned it to the Exhibition of Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century organized by Dr. William R. Valentiner. Valentiner was regarded at the time as one of the world's leading authorities on Dutch art, and published the then standard works on Rembrandt, Pieter de Hooch and Frans Hals. Valentiner was the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts when he mounted this exhibition.[3] By this point the painting had been cleaned and initials were now visible in the lower right of the canvas. Valentiner read them as J.M.f. and catalogued the work as by Jan Miense Molenaer. The exhibition began in New York and then went on to museums in Detroit, Toledo, St. Louis, Baltimore, Dayton and Cambridge, Massachusetts. When Frank Sabin later published the work in his own catalog of 1934 it was listed as signed correctly J. v. S. but without further attribution. By April 1944 it was once more at Christie's London, as by J. M. Molenaer, where the purchaser was recorded as West. It was next publicly exhibited in 1968 at the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck, Austria as Jan Miense Molenaer and additionally stated to be dated 1665 (?). Later that year Galerie Frederike Pallamar in Vienna also published it in their catalog. By 1969 it is in the collection of the Hon. Francis Dominic Murnaghan, Jr. of Baltimore who served as the president, Chairman and ultimately the Chairman Emeritus of the Walters Art Gallery. The painting descended in the family until 2024.

Although this painting was originally believed to be the work of Frans Hals, and subsequently catalogued by Dr. Valentiner as Jan Miense Molenaer, Dr. Fred G. Meijer has correctly identified the monogram as that of Juriaan van Streek based on photographs from when it was cleaned in the 1930s. He further dates it as an early work from around the mid-1650s. Van Streek is known as a painter of still lifes, but at the start of his career he did works of genre and possibly portraits. One notable example is titled *The Smoker* in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow.[4]

From the few surviving examples some characteristic traits are noticeable. In his choice of sitters there is a "conscious rejection of the idealization of the human figure." The background space is not important, primarily functioning as in still lifes as a harmonious backdrop. His emphasis instead is with the figures and objects as demonstrated by this work in which their voluminous forms predominate.[5]

Single figures blowing up a bladder are unusual in seventeenth century Dutch paintings as they are typically incorporated into more complex genre scenes. As Van Streek would later execute *vanitas* still lifes, perhaps the theme of the fleeting nature of pleasure appealed. Always a work that attracted attention when *A Boy Blowing up a Bladder* was put on public display, Van Streek has encapsulated all the innocence and charm traditionally associated with childhood and personified the simple joy of just having fun.

[1] Donna R. Barnes & Peter G. Rose, *Childhood Pleasures*, Syracuse University Press, N.Y., 2012, pp. 9, 112-113.

[2] Biographical information from Walter Liedtke, "Rembrandt van Rijn, *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*" in *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Yale University Press, volume II, New Haven, 2007, p. 647; and Linda Borean, "Sir Abraham Hume as Collector and Writer" in *The Reception of Titian in Britain 1769 – 1877*, Brepols, 2013, p. 85.

[3] E.P. Richardson, "William R. Valentiner", *The University of Chicago Press Journals at journals*. (1) Chicago.edu.

[4] Written communications from Dr. Fred G. Meijer dated May 10, 2025, and September 5, 2025.

[5] Shelly Rosenthal, "Juriaan van Streek als Figurenmaler" in *Oud Holland*, volume 55, no. 2, January 1938, pp. 83-86.