

PAN

AMSTERDAM

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



The Orphan Girls of the Burgerweeshuis

signed and dated Thérèse Schwartze. 1889. in the upper left, and inscribed Psalm 146.9 in the upper right
oil on an unlined canvas, in its original nineteenth-century frame
67 × 79 inches (170.18 × 200.66 cm)

PROVENANCE

Acquired by a "Foreigner", Amsterdam, 1889

Ichabod T. Williams, Esq., New York (1824 – 1899) by 1898

Notable Collection of Valuable Paintings, Formed by the Late Ichabod T. Williams, Esq., American Art Galleries, New York, February 3, 1915, lot 117, illustrated, where purchased by J.W. Franklin

Mrs. William B. Kinney, by 1921, who gifted it to

The Newark Museum of Art, Newark, New Jersey, 1921 until 2017 when it was deaccessioned

EXHIBITED

Paris, Salon, May 1 – June 30, 1889,
no. 2449 (awarded a third- class medal)

Amsterdam, Tentoonstelling van Kunstwerken van Levende Meesters te Amsterdam, September 2 – October 2, 1889,
no. 388 (awarded a gold medal)

Munich, Münchener Jahresausstellung von Kunstwerken Aller Nation, opened July 1, 1890, no. 1151 (awarded a
second-class medal along with her self-portrait)

Chicago, Illinois, The World's Columbian Exposition, May 1 – October 31, 1893, no. 132 (awarded a medal)

New York, National Academy of Design, January–February 1894

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- "Thérèse Schwartz" on Artindex Lexicon online at artindex.nl/lexicon, illustrated

"Miss Schwartz, although a woman, is one of the best artists in Holland." [1]

For her entry in the Paris Salon of 1889 Thérèse Schwartz submitted this monumental painting of 7 girls dressed in the distinctive red and black uniform of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage, known as the Burgerweeshuis, that reflected the colors of the flag of Amsterdam. Their song derives from the Old Testament Psalm 146 verse 9 which proclaims: "The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow but He thwarts the ways of the wicked." [2] A sensation in Paris, it continued to enthrall crowds in its next 4 venues. It is one of Schwartz's most revelatory works whose message could not be more important for our own times.

Johan George Schwartz, the painter's father, was from a German family but had been born in Amsterdam and raised in Philadelphia. While studying at the art academy in Düsseldorf he met his future wife Elise Herrmann. They eventually settled in Amsterdam in 1844, where he became a very successful portrait painter. Schwartz began her training with her father at the age of 10 and worked alongside him by the time she was 16. She also attended classes at Amsterdam's Art Academy for 2 years. [3]

In 1874 when she was 23, Schwartz's father died leaving her the sole provider for her widowed mother, 3 sisters and a brother. During what must have been a shattering time, the artist's biographer Cora Hollema recounts Schwartz's preparedness, stating her father "had instilled in her an unequivocal understanding of her life's task. The crucial thing was to earn money, she was his successor, and she was destined to provide for her family. She applied herself to this task with considerable energy, purposefulness and success, and continued to do so until her death in 1918". [4]

In 1875 she travelled to Munich for further study with Karl Theodor von Piloty, Gabriel von Max, and Franz von Lenbach. From 1878 to 1889 she travelled to Paris at least 7 times, with stays lasting between several weeks to a number of months. Perhaps notable in 1879 she lodged at Mademoiselle Didier's orphanage. On these trips she came in contact with Jean-Jacques Henner, Léon Bonnat and Henry Harpignies, who would all prove beneficial in furthering her career. [5]

In 1880 an enormous opportunity occurred when Schwartz was invited to visit the Paleis Soestdijk for several weeks and provide painting lessons to Marie, wife of Prince Hendrik of the Netherlands. This fostered a relationship with the court which resulted in 6 Royal commissions over the next 35 years. She would become the portraitist of the elite, working in both pastels and oils, and remained so for the rest of her life. [6]

Schwartz exhibited works in Paris from 1878–1896. In 1888 the Uffizi Gallery in Florence requested a portrait of the artist to add to its famous collection of artists' self-portraits. This was an incredible honor, all the more as the collection had few Dutch artists and none of her female compatriots. She showed her self-portrait twice in Paris before sending it to the Uffizi, once at the Salon of 1888, as well as the Exposition Universelle of 1889, where it won a gold medal. [7] That same year the Salon opened only several days prior to the Exposition Universelle, and for two months ran concurrently. During what must have been an exhilarating time Schwartz debuted *The Orphan Girls of the Burgerweeshuis* at the Salon.

She had painted orphan girls previously, foremost *Three Girls from the Amsterdam Burgerweeshuis* of 1885, now in the Rijksmuseum, and *Five Orphans from the Amsterdam Maagdenhuis* of 1888, in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Both works were acquired by the museums the same year they were painted, signifying the obvious general appeal of the subject. [8] *The Burgerweeshuis*, which Schwartz's 1889 work also represents and is the most monumental of the 3, was regarded as the embodiment of social reform as well as a source of great civic pride. [9]

It was established in 1520 and in 1581 moved to a building located between the Kalverstraat, the Begijnhof, and the Keizersgracht. Only children whose parents had been middle-class were allowed admittance into the orphanage. Should tragedy strike, the institution was felt to be a reward for the offspring of those who had maintained the social contract of good citizenship in Amsterdam. The poor were sent to the Aalmoezeniersweeshuis. [10] Both boys and girls of the Burgerweeshuis were dressed in vertically divided red and black uniforms. [11] Their overall care was on par if not above the average middle-class child. They received regular medical attention, were well fed, and had adequate sleeping quarters. [12] Most importantly, the Burgerweeshuis was concerned with their future, from the age of 10 training began in a variety of skills. Until the age of 16, girls were put in the orphanage workshop and given sewing or knitting duties. All the clothing and linens needed in the institution came from the workshop. From 16 until 18, girls left the workshop to be employed in a section of the orphanage where they cleaned, prepared meals, or cared for

young or sick children. What they did not do were any tasks in the boys' quarters, as the sexes were kept strictly segregated. Hired maids cleaned the male dorms. At 18 the girls returned to the workshop to teach the new trainees and refine their skills. Upon graduation at 20, their highly disciplined training made them sought-after workers. The same initial practices and governing rules of the institution held throughout the nineteenth century.[13] It is clear that Schwartze also held the institution in high regard.

The jury of the Salon awarded the painting a third-class medal, an amazing achievement for a woman and a foreigner. Accolades were showered upon it by the press, perhaps best summed up by Firmin Javel writing after the show in *L'Art Français*, "one of the most remarkable paintings of the last Salon." As if she had reached the pinnacle of possible achievement in Paris after 1889 Schwartze did not return for years.[14]

By September 2, 1889 the painting was back in Amsterdam and exhibited at the *Tentoonstelling van Kunstwerken van Levende Meesters*, where it was awarded a gold medal.[15] *De Hollandsche Lelie* (The Dutch Lily), a weekly magazine for young ladies, announced that the painting had been sold to a foreigner for 5,000 florins, the equivalent today of approximately \$180,000.[16] The fact that it was now sold would not have deterred it from being exhibited in future shows, as this was most likely a condition of its sale. In the contracts that Schwartze employed for commissioned portraits, it was always stated that she had the right to exhibit the work at any time.[17]

It was next sent to Munich in 1890 along with her self-portrait for exhibition in the *Münchener Jahresausstellung von Kunstwerken Aller Nationen*, where both paintings shared a second-class medal.[18] Once again, moving tributes were paid to the Orphans by the German press. Her skill was described as equal to that of Thomas de Keyser, Rembrandt, and Bartholomeus van der Helst.[19]

After a 2-year hiatus the work reappeared in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, at the time viewed as the most exciting destination in America but soon became one of its most notorious. Nicknamed the White City, as most of its buildings were white, the Fair also served as the hunting ground for the serial killer known as Dr. H. H. Holmes.[20] The exhibition catalog called the painting "perhaps the most fascinating of all in the Holland exhibit... It is impossible to escape the exquisite charm of this simple scene, it is so touching, and so poetic, that after looking at it for a while few can restrain a tear." [21] Befittingly, it was awarded a medal.

The painting's final exhibition was held at the National Academy of Design in New York from late January through February of 1894. This was a show of Dutch and Scandinavian works that had come from the World's Columbian Exposition. It was once again mentioned in the press as one of the highlights.[22]

Ownership by Ichabod T. Williams of the Orphans was revealed when it was illustrated in an article by Elizabeth W. Champney on "Modern Dutch Painters" for *The Century* magazine in July 1898. It remains unknown if Williams was the original foreign buyer in 1889. He ran a lumber business founded by his grandfather that had offices in New York, Mexico, South America, and West Africa. Further, he was Director of the People's Bank and an avid art collector with an extensive collection.[23] On February 3, 1905, his collection was sold by the American Art Galleries in the grand ballroom of the Plaza Hotel in New York. Schwartze's painting was bought, as reported in the papers, by a J. B. Franklin, whose identity as a dealer, agent, or collector remains a mystery.

At a later date the painting was acquired by Mrs. William B. Kinney, née Murphy; her father was the Hon. Franklin Murphy, former governor of New Jersey. When she gifted Schwartze's work to the Newark Museum of Art in 1921, her husband was serving as one of its Vice Presidents and was the former Chairman of its Finance Committee.[24] There it remained for the next 96 years until the museum deaccessioned it in 2017.

Schwartze did not marry until she was 55 and her husband, Anton van Duyl, 77. He was a critic, journalist and art connoisseur as well as editor-in-chief from 1865 to 1885 of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, a leading newspaper in Amsterdam. Schwartze had always been keenly aware of the need for self-promotion, and Van Duyl had acted as an invaluable mentor since 1880.[25] Even after Schwartze became a millionaire, she could not stop working. Apparently the fear of failure or bankruptcy that had been instilled into her during childhood consumed her life. She was able to provide for her family, maintain their home at 109 Prinsengracht, as well as purchase the two adjoining houses on either side where they all lived and worked, including her husband.[26]

Taking on the 'man's' role in life set her apart from contemporaries at a time "when middle-class women were expected to marry early and rely on their husband's income" Her friend and fellow artist Wally Moes further remarked on Schwartze's fundamental difference, "Because of her father there was an American strain in her character. She did everything on a grand scale and had a certain daring that Dutch people tend to lack". She noted Schwartze was "someone with a strong urge to survive and tremendous energy." Simply put Schwartze always believed in herself.

Such drive inspired the next generation of female artists, notably the Amsterdam Joffers which included her niece Lizzy Ansingh.[27]

In *The Orphans of the Burgerweeshuis*, Schwartzé showcased the plight of the unwanted and helpless, a painted spiritual plea that moved multitudes. The passage of time has done nothing to diminish the importance of the painting's message, if anything, it has become even more germane. Sympathy for the foreign and forsaken inherent in Schwartzé created this masterpiece.

This painting will be included in the forthcoming book by Cora Hollema on Thérèse Schwartzé.

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Universal Exposition Publishing, St. Louis, 1905, p. 524
- [2] "Psalm 146:9," BibleRef.com, <https://www.bibleref.com>.
- [3] Hanna Klarenbeek, op.cit., p. 35; and Cora Hollema, 2021, op. cit., pp. 6, 12.
- [4] Cora Hollema, 2021, op. cit., p. 8.
- [5] Hanna Klarenbeek, op. cit., pp. 38–39.
- [6] Cora Hollema, 2021, op. cit., pp. 34, 74, 183.
- [7] Hanna Klarenbeek, op. cit., p. 51.
- [8] "Thérèse Schwartzé, Three Girls from the Amsterdam Orphanage" at Rijksmuseum.nl on www.rijksmuseum.nl; and "Thérèse Schwartzé, Five Orphans from the Amsterdam Maagdenhuis" at Museum boijmans van beuningen on boijmans.nl.
- [9] Dr. Marion Deshmukh, Max Liebermann: Modern Art and Modern Germany, Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington, VT, 2015, pp. 71, 73–74.
- [10] Anne E. C. McCants, Civic Charity in the Golden Age, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1997, pp. 25, 28, 34.
- [11] Derek Phillips, Well-Being in Amsterdam's Golden Age, Pallas Publication, Amsterdam, 2008, p. 176.
- [12] Hanna van Solinge, Evelien Walhout, & Frans van Poppel, "Determinants of Institutionalization of Orphans in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch Town" in *Continuity and Change*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 161–162.
- [13] Anne E. C. McCants, op. cit. pp. 25, 84; and Hanna van Solinge, op. cit., p. 162.
- [14] Hanna Klarenbeek, op. cit., p. 54.
- [15] De Opmerker, op. cit., p. 343.
- [16] De Hollandsche Lelie, op. cit., p. 157.
- [17] Cora Hollema, 2021, op.cit., p. 74.
- [18] Dr. Wilhelm Lauser, "Nachtrag zum Glaspalaste" in *Allgemeine Kunst-Chronik*, November 1890, op. cit., p. 635.
- [19] Adolf Rosenberg, "Therese Schwartzé" in *Monatshefte*, op. cit., p. 649.
- [20] See Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City*, Vintage Books, New York, 2003
- [21] Trumbull White & Wm. Ingleheart, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, Chicago, 1893, op. cit., pp. 379–380.
- [22] William T. Comstock in "Art Notes" in *Architecture and Building*, op. cit., p. 47.
- [23] "Ichabod T. Williams" in *The New York Times*, March 3, 1899; and "Pioneer Mahogany Lumber & Veneer Firm" in

The Timberman, Portland, Oregon, May 1922, p. 37.

[24] The Library, Newark, N.J., volume 1, no. 7, February 1921, p. 13; and written communication from Heidi Warbasse, Database Manager, Collections, The Newark Museum of Art, dated May 26, 2021.

[25] Cora Hollema, 2021, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

[26] Cora Hollema, “Thérèse Schwartz, Painting for a Living” in How to Pastel at www.howtopastel.com, February 29, 2016; and Cora Hollema, 2021, op. cit., p. 183

[27] Cora Hollema, February 29, 2016, op. cit., and Cora Hollema, 2021, op.cit., pp. 13, 181.