

KLAAS MULLER

F R A N S S N Y D E R S A N D S T U D

Growling dog near a basket, filled with meat

In a kitchen, a dog guards its booty from another dog that appears on the right. Apparently, he has pulled away from his chain and is not giving up his booty (entrails) lightly. On the left of the painting, we can depict a basket with veal.

Frans Snijders had a predilection for depicting dogs and they appear frequently in his oeuvre. About seven can be named as scenes in larders or front rooms of kitchens. The theme is usually similar: a dog defends its stolen loot against another dog (e.g. a painting on loan with a similar theme among others in the Snijders-Rockoxhuis "Larder with dogs and a cows head").

It remains conjecture whether Snijders was pursuing a metaphor or deeper symbolism with this theme. However: each time, he shows himself to be a fantastic cinematographer and manages to render a scene just before the climax through which he builds the tension. Also typical is the dog's head on the right, which is only partially depicted (cut off from the composition it seems) which generates even more movement. The textures of the meat are fantastically rendered.

In this type of painting, pets are depicted without their masters, in often dramatic, yet everyday situations of human life. Snijders depicts barbaric animal behaviour, which is not guided by reason or education, but seems driven by mere urges. For instance, the dog is often accused of gluttony. This idea was also very much present in the very popular proverbs of the time like e.g. 'While a dog gnaws his leg, he hates his company'. Like the more traditional genre scenes, these paintings also have a moralising ulterior motive that aims to encourage thrift and virtue, the opposite of gluttony (cf. Susan Koslow, Snijders, Mercatorfonds Paribas, 1995, pp. 271-273).

This painting is from the collection of Gaston van den Berghe, the last owner of the castle of Zevenbergen in Ranst, which had a very long history. In 1542, the castle was already destroyed once by the troops of Maarten van Rossum (1490-1555), in 1590 by the Spanish troops led by Ambrogio Spinola (1569-1630). Afterwards, it was rebuilt in 1613 and later embellished in 1733 according to French style. Unfortunately, the castle was destroyed by a major fire in 1914 and finally demolished in 1968. What remained are the foundations and some service buildings from the 18th century. How long this particular painting had been in the castle is not known.

Oil on Canvas, 117 x 195cm



Circa: Ca 1650