LOT 52
HENDRICK TERBRUGGHEN
DEVENTER 1588 - 1629 UtrechT
MUCIUS SCAEVOLA BEFORE PORSENNa
oil on canvas
69 3/8 by 81 1/4 in.; 176 by 206.8 cm.

ESTIMATE 300,000-400,000 USD

PROVENANCE
Most probably Hendrick Christiansz. Hoeffslager (circa 1580-1625); 
His estate sale, Amsterdam, 19 March 1625, lot 45, for 44 guilders; 
To Herman de Bisschop (baptised 1588-1637); 
Private collection, North Italy; 
With a Genoese art dealer; 
Private collection, Lausanne; 
Art market, Lausanne, by 1973; 
EXHIBITED
London, Helikon, Exhibition of Old Masters, June-September 1974;
New York, Knoedler, in collaboration with Fine Arts International, London, Exhibition of Old Masters, 7 May - 6 June 1981, no. 7 (the present work was included in the catalogue but did not appear in the exhibition).

LITERATURE
D.O. Obreen, Archief voor Nederlandsche Kunstgeschiedenis, VI, 1884-1887, p. 37 (cites a painting depicting Marcus Mutius, Romeyn by Terbrugghen in Hoeffslager sale, without reference to the present work);
B. Nicolson, Hendrick Terbrugghen, The Hague 1958, p. 49 (cites the Hoeffslager painting in connection with Terbrugghen's Emperor Claudius);
B. Nicolson, "Terbrugghen Since 1960," in Album Amicorum J.G. Van Gelder, The Hague 1973, pp. 238-239, reproduced figs. 7 and 8 (detail), (as art market, Lausanne);
B. Nicolson, Caravaggism in Europe, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged by L. Vertova, Oxford 1979, p. 189;
G. Algranti, Exhibition of Old Masters, exhibition catalogue, London 1974 [np];
G. Algranti, Exhibition of Old Masters, exhibition catalogue, New York, 1981, no. 7, reproduced in color and detail in black and white;
C. Schuckman, "Did Hendrick ter Brugghen Revisit Italy? Notes from an Unknown Manuscript by Cornelis de Bie," Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury, no. 4, 1986, pp. 9-10, reproduced p. 15, fig. 14;
M.J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz. ter Brugghen" in the previous publication, p. 71;
P. van Kooij, "Ter Brugghen, Dürer and Lucas van Leyden," Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury, no. 5, 1987, pp. 15 and 19 note 9, reproduced p. 15, fig. 10 (as attributed to Terbrugghen and, incorrectly, as with Algranti, London);
J. Nieuwstraten, "Some Remarks on Ter Brugghen," in the previous publication, pp. 100-101 (as not by Terbrugghen, possibly by R. van Adelo);
In Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna, Hendrick Terbrugghen, one of the most innovative of the Netherlandish followers of Caravaggio, has created a dramatic representation of this unusual subject from Roman history. The setting is Rome circa 509 B.C. as the Etruscans were laying siege to the city. In an attempt to assassinate Lars Porsenna, the Etruscan king, Mucius Scaevola mistakenly killed Porsenna’s secretary and was immediately captured by the enemy. The king ordered him to be burned alive but in a gesture of defiance, Mucius thrust his right hand into the fire warning the king that he was just the first of 300 Romans who would pursue him. Impressed by this act of Stoic virtue and, no doubt, by the thought of further attempts on his life, King Porsenna lifted the siege and withdrew. Mucius was rewarded with a grant of land and given the name Scaevola, meaning "left-handed."

The subject was rarely depicted in the Netherlands in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and art historians have searched for a prototype for the present work. One of the few possible precedents is known only from Karel van Mander's description of a lost painting by Goltzius in his biography of the artist (see Literature, Slatkes and Franits, p. 142). Here Terbrugghen shows the young Roman stretching out his arm so his fist is over the flame and glaring at the king. His gesture is heightened and echoed by the bare arms of his captors. The king points in his direction but seems to stare blankly into the distance, perhaps shocked by Mucius’s response. The largest and most striking figure is the secretary; curled up with his limbs twisted, his head hanging down to the ground, his body blocks the entire lower left corner of the composition and seems almost to extend into our space. Various sources have been suggested for the pose of the secretary, but the most compelling is Weber's proposal that is the body of St. John in the Baptist from the right wing of Rubens's Adoration of the Magi, in the St. Janskerk, Maline. Although Benedict Nicolson considered this a late picture, Leonard Slatkes' and Wayne Franits' argument for a date of around 1620 is far more compelling. They compare it to the Christ Crowned with Thorns in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, dated 1620 and the Calling of Saint Matthew in the Musée d’art modern André Malraux, Le Havre. All three compositions are constructed on a narrow stage, the large figures crowded together. They make emphatic, repetitive gestures, which Terbrugghen emphasizes, particularly in the present work and Christ Crowned with Thorns, by setting the figures’ bare arms against the darker drapery and background. In addition, the figure standing at the right in the present work appears to be taken from the same model as the seated man in the center of the Calling of St. Matthew.

The present work was first attributed to Terbrugghen by Benedict Nicolson in 1973 and was included by Blankert and Slatkes in the ground-breaking exhibition of 1986, Holländische Malerei in neuem Licht: Hendrick ter Brugghen und seine Zeitgenossen (see Literature). However, since then, some art historians have questioned the attribution. Franits suggests that only part of the composition may be by Terbrugghen, while Nieuwstraten and Janssen believe it to be the work of another artist entirely (see Literature).

In 1625 an inventory was made of the collection of the late Hendrick Christiaensz. Hoeffslager prior to its being sold at the Orphan Chamber Court in Amsterdam. The sale took place on 19 March 1625 and lot 45 was described as “1 stuck van Marcus Mutius Romeyn van Hendrick ter Brugge 144:−:−:− ” [a depiction of Marcus Mucius Roman by Hendrick Terbrugghen 44 guilders]. It was purchased by Herman de Bisschop (baptised 1588-1637). Although without further evidence the Hoeffslager picture cannot be definitively identified as the present work, it seems
extremely likely given the rarity of the subject during this period in the Netherlands. That would make Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna the only painting by Terbrugghen to be sold at auction during his lifetime.

1. G.J.M. Weber, op. cit. A similar figure can be found in Guido Reni's Triumph of Samson, Pinoteca, Bologna, but the earlier date of the Rubens makes it a far more likely choice. For a review of this issue see Slatkes and Franits, pp. 14 and 143. At some point in the history of the painting, the lower quarter was cut off, removing the disturbing corpse. It was later restored. See Literature, Nicolson 1973 and Condition Report for further details.


4. Ibid.

5. Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, record no. 20617.

Fig. 1

Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629), Christ Crowned with Thorns, 1620. Statens Museum for Kunst/National Gallery of Denmark