

Alfred Bober Fonds

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Chemistry and Art
More Adventures of a Chemist Collector

Chapter 5 -
More Great Paintings by
Old Masters

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Chapter 5

More Great Paintings by Old Masters

Caravaggio

Perhaps the most exciting painting I ever acquired was the Lute Player sold by Sotheby's in New York, in January 2001, for \$110,000. That was not the reason Isabel and I were there, for we had gone specifically to buy a lovely but very dirty and unpublished painting of Tobit by Eeckhout^(fig.), signed and dated 1652. Eeckhout may have seen his friend Rembrandt's 1626 treatment of almost the same subject (RRP A3). In Eeckhout's painting, the old, blind Tobit is clearly fearful that his wife may have stolen the kid. In Rembrandt's version, Tobit regrets having accused his wife of theft. During the preview, I was bothered when Ben Hall of Sotheby's offered to take the painting down from the high spot where it was hard to see, to show me its real beauty with the help of mineral spirits. I already knew how much I liked the painting and feared that he would do the same for others. Whether others had a good look at it or not I do not know, but I was able to buy it for the bargain hammer price of \$30,000.

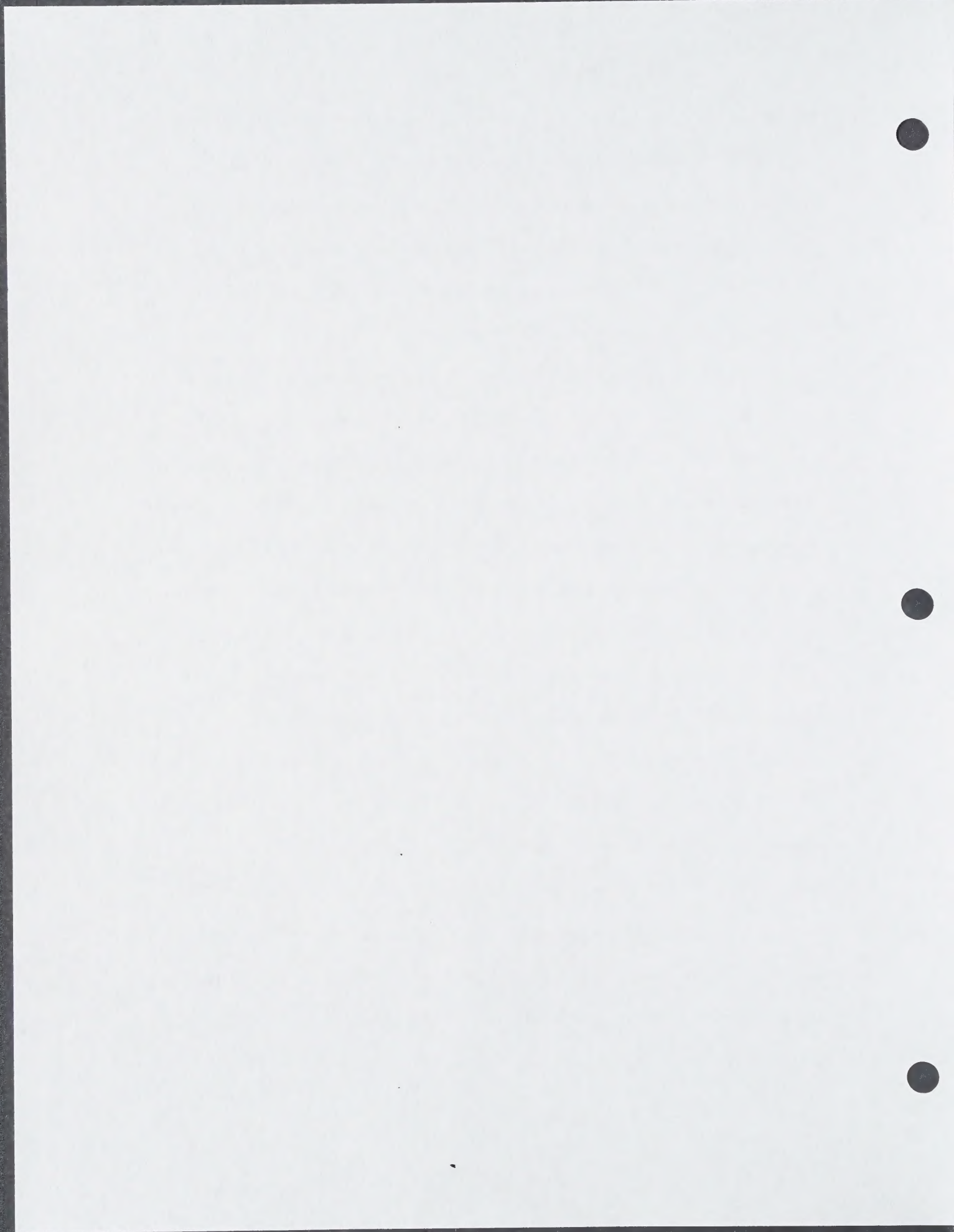
Of course, we looked at all the other paintings in the preview and really liked one other, lot 179, the large Lute Player, catalogued as Circle of Caravaggio and estimated at \$100,000 to \$150,000. Its appearance was deceptive, because the thick, yellowed varnish gave it the impression of a later work, even nineteenth century - but it had been in an English country house since 1726. I am no expert on Caravaggio, or on Italian baroque paintings, but as luck would have it, our friend Clovis Whitfield, who certainly is an expert in these things, was at the preview at the same time. And so I asked him to look at



lot 179. He was intrigued as I was, only armed with more knowledge. We agreed that I would bid on the painting, and if I was successful, he would research the picture.

Since then, Clovis has worked hard to trace the history of the Lute Player, to show that it is not only a work by Caravaggio, but the prime original and the work that the artist himself recalled as his finest production. Tracing its history back to the eighteenth century was easy. The nineteen-year-old Henry Somerset, 3rd Duke of Beaufort, had acquired it on his Grand Tour as a Caravaggio. In Rome, where he was a supporter of the Old Pretender, he spent the enormous sum of 30,000 *scudi* on art, 200 of which on the Lute Player, which was then sent to England to hang at the family seat in Gloucestershire, Badminton House. Never visited by connoisseurs like George Vertue, Horace Walpole, or Waagen, the collection had many great works, but the Lute Player came to be regarded as a copy, and it was sent for sale at Sotheby's in 1969, where it brought £750. Marshall Spink, a dealer in London, bought it, and then sold it to a family in Athens, Greece, looking for decorations for their home. On their deaths, the contents of the home were sold to a dealer in London, who consigned the Lute Player to Sotheby's auction in New York in 2001. He must have been happy that I paid \$110,000 for it. So was I.

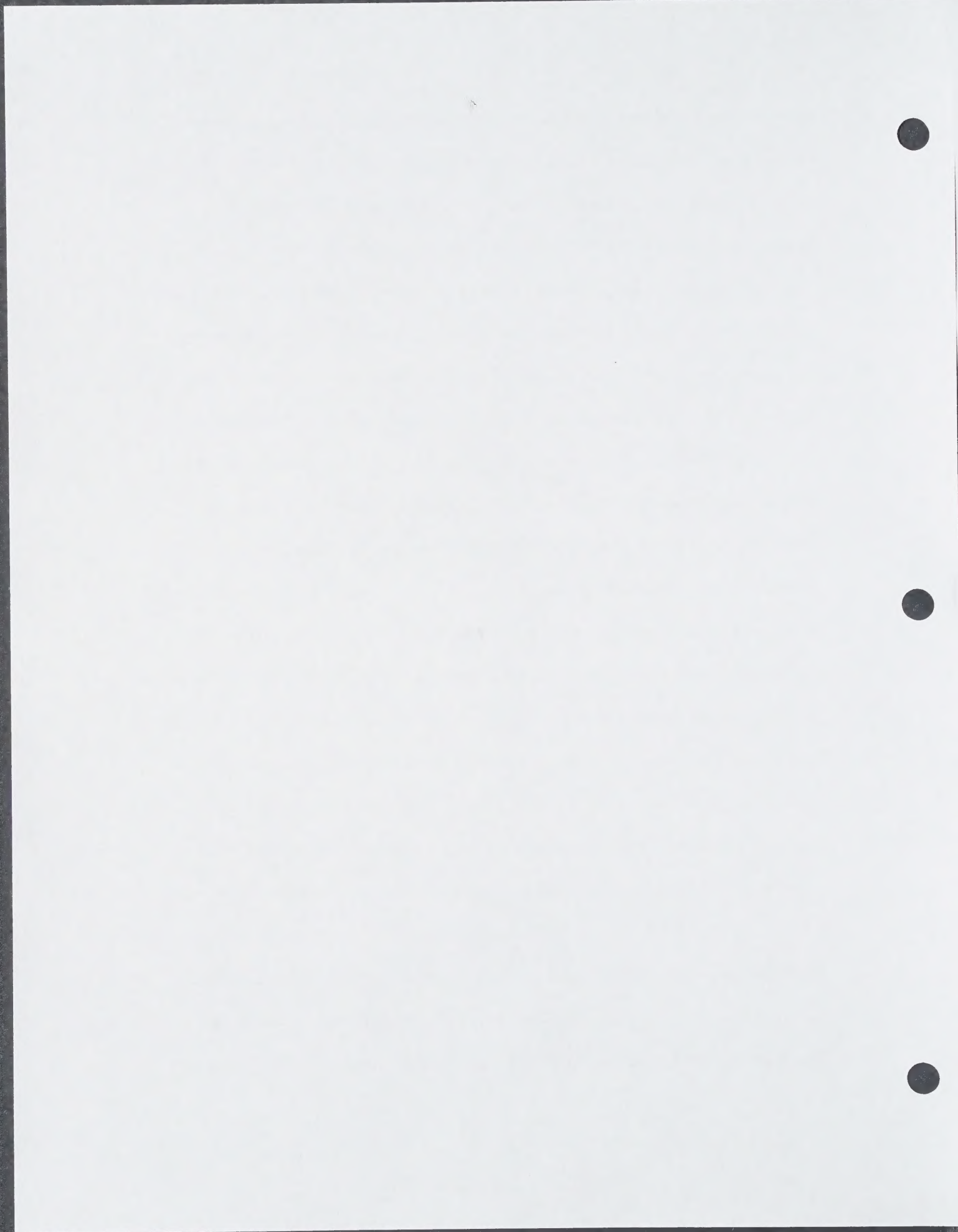
To discover the path of the Lute Player from 1726 back to the time Caravaggio painted it, around 1596/8, was more difficult. It is not clear whether the Duke of Beaufort bought it in Rome, or on the way back from the Grand Tour through the Marches and Venice, but at Badminton, it was admired as Caravaggio's "Venetian courtesan", and its fame in Rome in Cardinal Del Monte's collection forgotten. The situation is complicated by the fame of the more famous Lute Player that has hung in St. Petersburg at the Hermitage since the early nineteenth century. This work ^(fig.) came



from the collection of Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, Caravaggio's other main patron in Rome, and is first described in the inventory of his collection drawn up in 1638.

It had already been noticed that this famous work was lacking some of the elements described by Baglione, the earliest of Caravaggio's biographers. Giovanni Baglione famously brought a libel case against Caravaggio and friends for defamation, and bore him a grudge, but he did devote a fascinating biography to him, and described the Lute Player in the collection of Cardinal Del Monte with more detail than any other of his works in his 1642 *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti* (p.136): "He also painted for the Cardinal [Del Monte] a young man, playing the Lute, who seemed altogether alive and real with a carafe of flowers full of water, in which you could see perfectly the reflection of a window and other features of that room inside the water, and on those flowers there was a lively dew depicted with every exquisite care. And this (he said) was the best piece he ever painted." Only our version^(fig.) fits this description, for the carafe with the reflections, and the dewdrops on the flowers and fruit^(fig.), are absent from the Hermitage picture - and it used to be said, by way of explanation, that these features must have been cleaned away at some point, which is not the case.

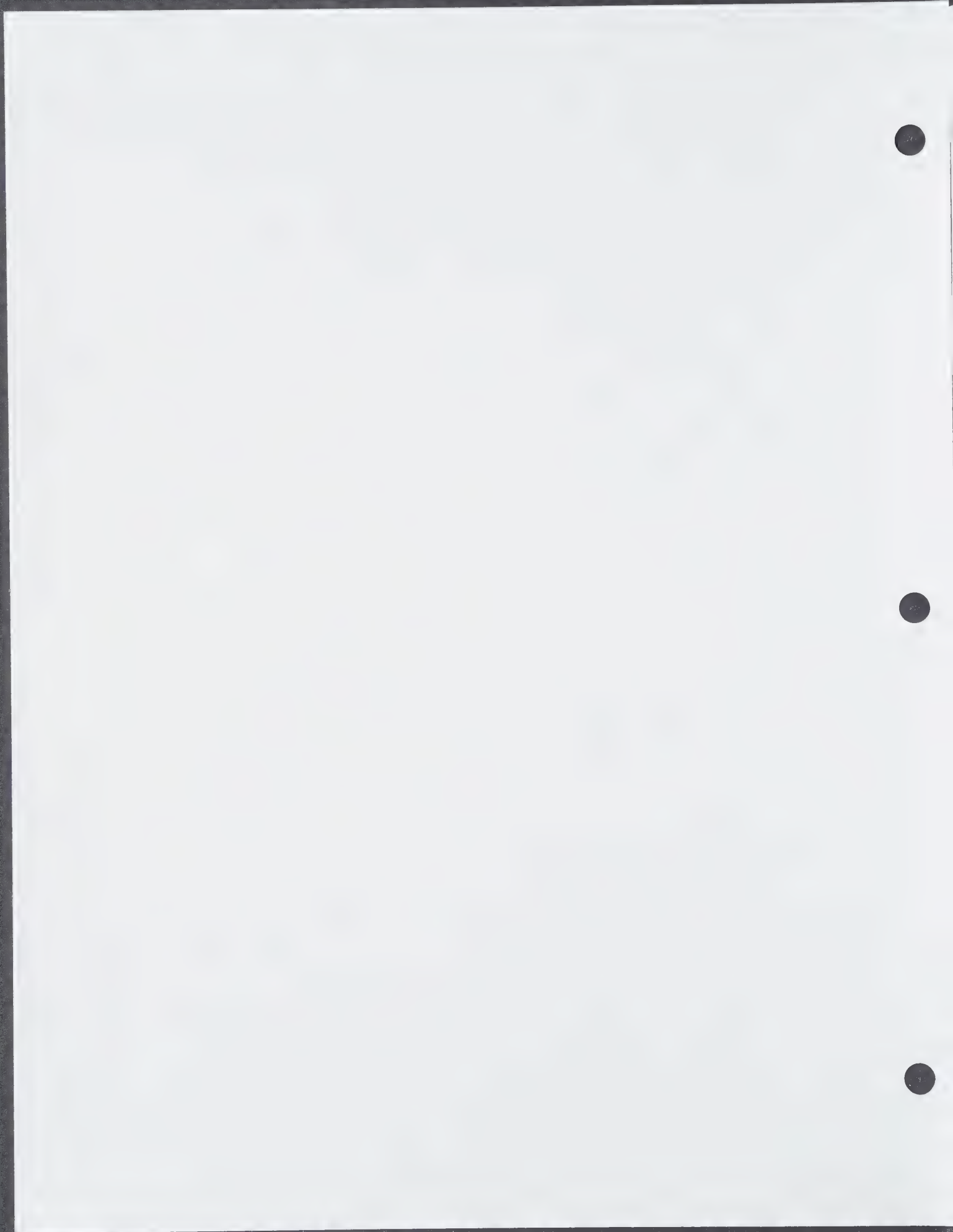
Two other Lute Players have come to light, but with musical instruments (including a significant spinet) in place of the flowers and fruit, one owned by Wildenstein's^(fig.) that has been traced back to Cardinal Antonio Barberini's purchase from the Del Monte heirs in 1628 of a picture of "young man playing the spinet". But then, the vendors did not describe the work as by Caravaggio when they sold it, unlike the two others in the group he bought, which included the *St. Catherine* now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, Madrid, and the *Cardsharps* in the Kimbell Museum,



Fort Worth. There, the “bird’s eye” perspective that affects the table, each musical instrument, and the birdcage, as well as the inconsistent lighting, look unlike Caravaggio’s. A fourth version, now in the Salini collection in Paris ^(fig.), also has musical instruments instead of the flowers, and seems to correspond with the copy Antonio Barberini had made of *his* version in 1642. So the painting from the New York sale is the only one to correspond to Baglione’s description, and it must be the work listed among Del Monte’s possessions in 1627 as a “young man, playing the lute, by Caravaggio” and distinct from the picture with a spinet sold to Cardinal Barberini.

To summarize: Clovis argues, I believe convincingly, that our painting is the *Luteplayer* mentioned by Baglione in the Del Monte Collection, while on the other hand Wildenstein’s *Luteplayer* in the Metropolitan Museum was sold by the Del Monte heirs in 1628 to Antonio Barberini. Therefore we have to assume that Del Monte actually possessed two versions of the *Luteplayer*, one “autograph” version (our painting) which was sold at an unknown date (but after 1627 when it is listed in the inventory drawn up for his heir Alessandro Del Monte) to an unknown collector, and an early pastiche (with spinet instead of flowers), now on loan to the Metropolitan Museum. This pastiche was sold in 1628 to Antonio Barberini. There is a copy of this in the Salini collection in Paris. Caravaggio painted a second, very beautiful version of the *Luteplayer* (without the reflections in the carafe described by Baglione) for Giustiniani, now at the Hermitage.

How did Caravaggio paint our painting? Clovis enlisted the help of Professor Martin Kemp at Oxford, author of *The Science of Art*, a work that traces the connection between art and science. Kemp published his conclusions in *Nature* (in the 28 November 2002 issue of Vol. 4209, p.364); Caravaggio probably used a concave mirror and the



result evidently greatly impressed the painting's first owner, Cardinal Del Monte, who gave the artist space to live in and work, probably at Palazzo Firenze, one of the buildings he looked after in Rome for his great friend, the Granduke Ferdinando de' Medici. Cardinal Del Monte lived in the Palazzo Firenze and the Palazzo Madama in Rome (both Medici properties) in his official role as representative of the Florentine Court in Rome. He was of course chosen for this role because of his long standing relation with Ferdinando and the Medici court.

Clovis, of course, has invited many experts to examine the painting, and also sent it to the Museum in Berlin, for the comparison with the Hermitage version then on view there. Sir Denis Mahon, the doyen of English experts on the Italian Baroque, agreed that our painting is by Caravaggio, and while at first he regarded the Hermitage picture as earlier, he subsequently came to see that since Baglione's description only fits our version, it must therefore be the first.

One of Italy's greatest Caravaggio experts, Professor Mina Gregori, agreed, and wrote the entry for the catalogue of the exhibition at which our picture was first publicly exhibited, a beautiful show of Italian Still Life titled *Stille Welt, Natura Morta Italiana*, that was presented in Munich at the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, and then in Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, from 2002-3.

An even more instructive exhibition titled *Caravaggio: Originale und Kopien im Spiegel der Forschung* (Caravaggio, Originals and Copies in the Mirror of Research) opened in the Düsseldorf Museum Kunst Palast in September 2006. The extensive catalogue illustrates all four Lute Players, each also with details and, most tellingly, on p. 95, the detail of the carafe with flowers exactly as described by Baglione, present only in

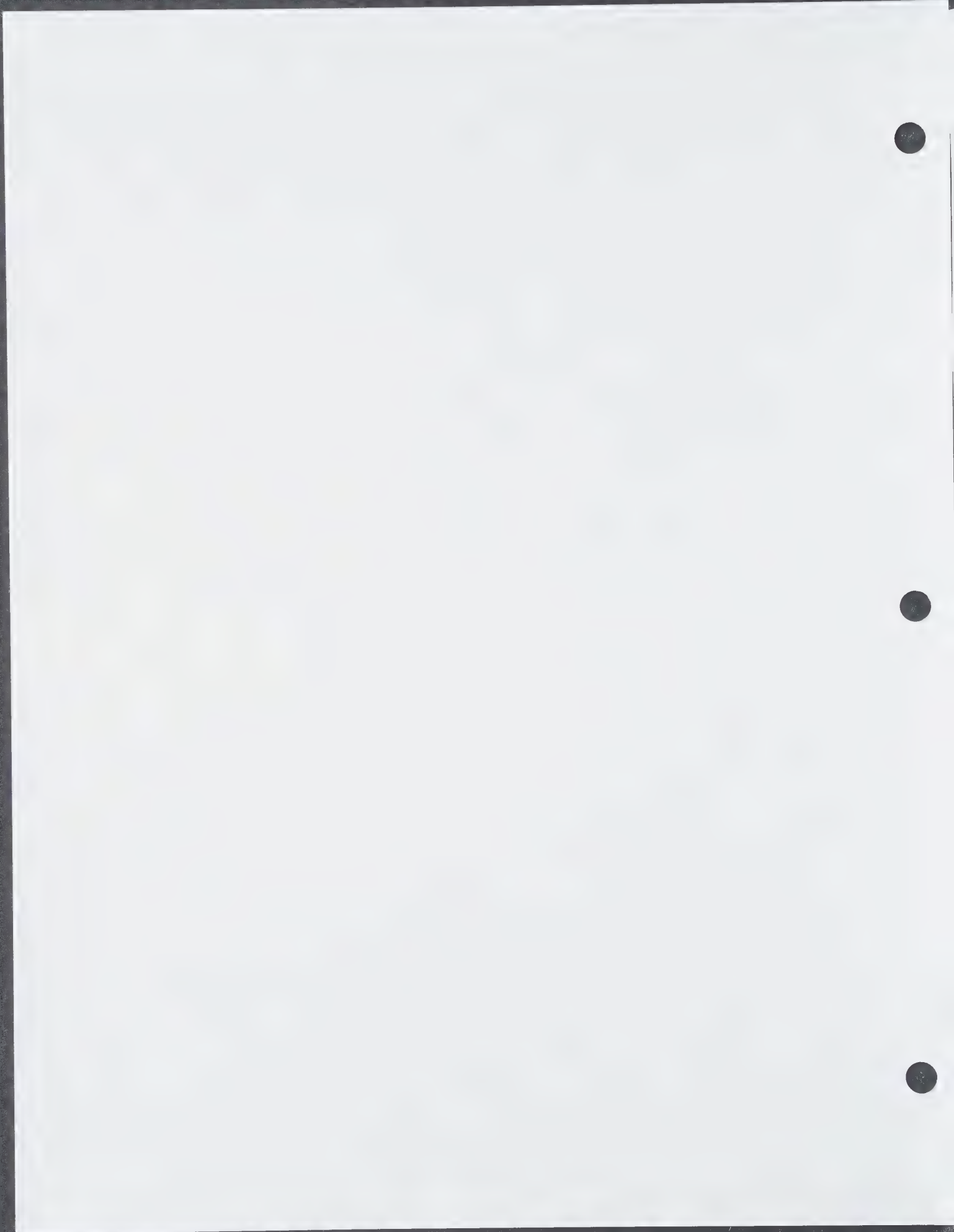


our version (catalog no. 33). The other version brought to Düsseldorf, from the Salini collection in Paris (catalog no. 32), is close to the Wildenstein picture, now on loan to the Metropolitan Museum; in both, a spinet replaces the flowers present in the Hermitage picture and our painting. The prominent pentiments visible in this area of our painting are another indication of its originality, and the presence of light incisions in the ground that have been found by the EMMEBICI laboratory in Rome are further indications of its status as the first version. It is hard to believe that the Salini collection work could be from the period when Caravaggio was working, even though Maurizio Marini claims in an essay (pp. 241-242), in the catalogue, that it is the first one. Clovis' essay (pp. 242-244) contradicting this idea, is very convincing. Of course, owners tend to be optimists, yet to me it seems clear that ours and the Hermitage versions alone are by Caravaggio, painted in that order, while the Wildenstein version is a competent pastiche, and the Salini version a copy, in turn, of the Wildenstein picture.

The next step Clovis is hoping to take is to publish an essay on Cardinal Del Monte's *studiolo* in what became the Villa Ludovisi, where he argues the painting originally hung, and to have the work included in the major retrospective in Rome that will mark the quarter centenary of the artist's death in 2010.

Velazquez

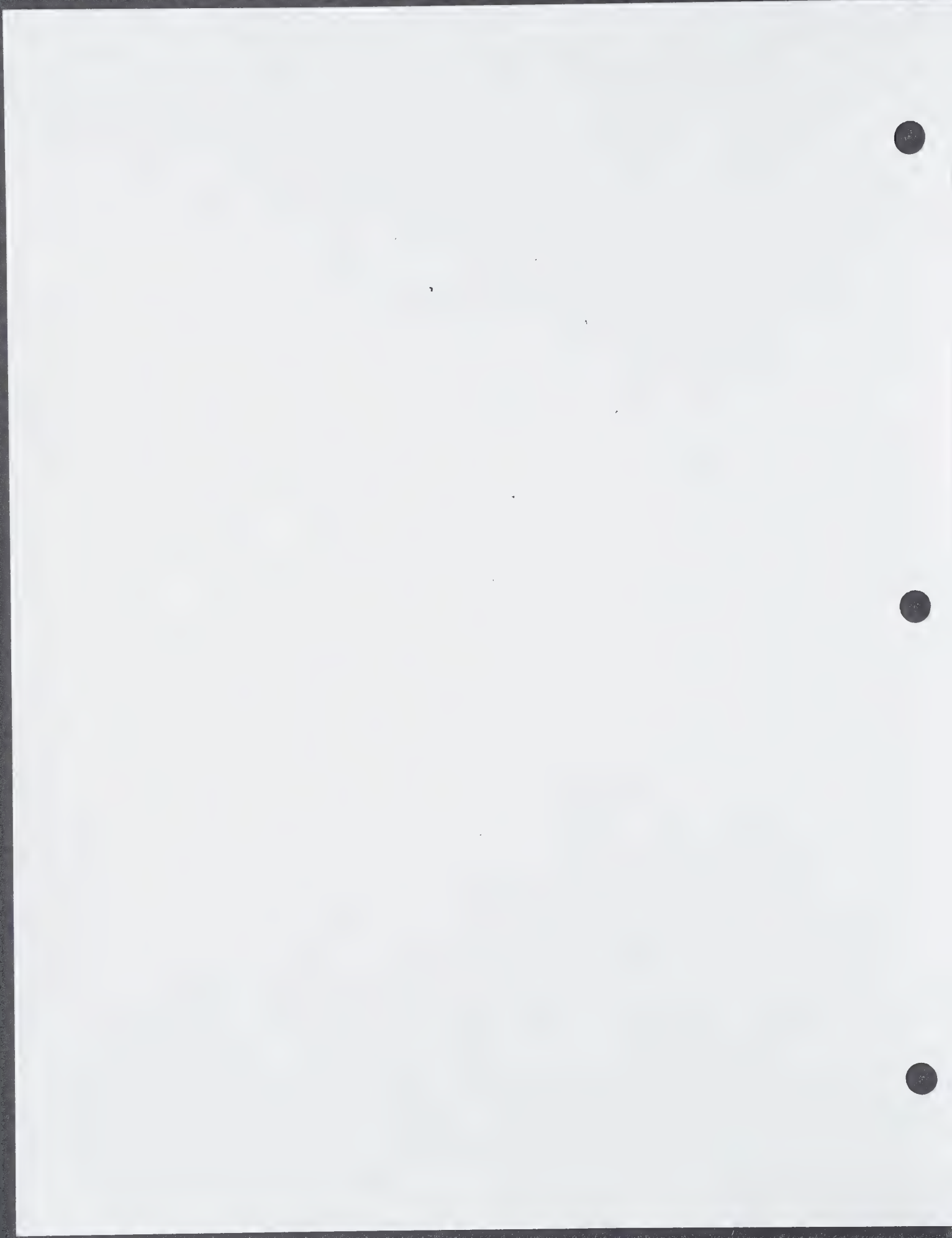
One of the most interesting and in some ways most difficult dealers I have ever known is Christophe Janet. French born into a wealthy family, educated at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, he has a fine eye for old masters and led me to some beautiful works. He also bought several paintings from me but was sometimes unreliable



businesswise. Some of his checks bounced, although eventually he always made good on them and once gave me a beautiful painting by Aert de Gelder in lieu. Life for his second wife, Roxane, a New Zealander, may have been difficult, since Christophe seemed to have no idea of how to manage his financial affairs and make regular, adequate provisions for his home life. However, Roxane was always charming, and they were a fun couple to be with. Eventually, in 1985, they left New York; Christophe undoubtedly hoped to do better in Paris.

Once they moved to France, we saw each other less frequently. However, early in December 1996, I met him in London, viewing the old master sales. He urged me to look at and bid on lot 36 in the Phillips sale on December 10, a charming study of a Chihuahua, a Mexican dwarf dog in a mountainous landscape, from the studio of Velazquez. Interestingly the painting was on the catalogue cover ^(fig.) of the Phillips sale on December 10, 1985, and the American collector who bought it then was now offering it eleven years later. The date 10 December has been an important one in my life - it was my last day in Vienna in 1938, and somehow, I have always been sadly alert on December 10. I really liked that little oil on canvas, just 47 x 37 cms., but so did several others, including Rob Noortman, and I had to go to a hammer price of £30,000, way above the estimate of £6,000-8,000.

If Christophe had not brought the painting to my attention, I would not have noticed the little gem, and so I promised him that if I could sell it profitably, we would share the profit equally. The painting was in very good condition. It just needed a simple cleaning by my friends Charles Munch and Jane Furchgott, and Charles found a decent frame for me.



Naturally I sent photographs to many art historians and received very diverse opinions. Werner Sumowski wrote that he had no doubt whatever that this was painted by Velazquez. He believed that the animal must come from the same hand as the dog in the portrait of the *Infant Don Fernando*, painted around 1632/36. And not just the dog but the landscape! But he concluded that, sadly, he was just Sumowski and not a Velazquez-dictator.

William Jordan, one of the great experts of Spanish seventeenth century paintings, thought differently. He remembered the little painting of a dog that he had seen at both Phillips sales:

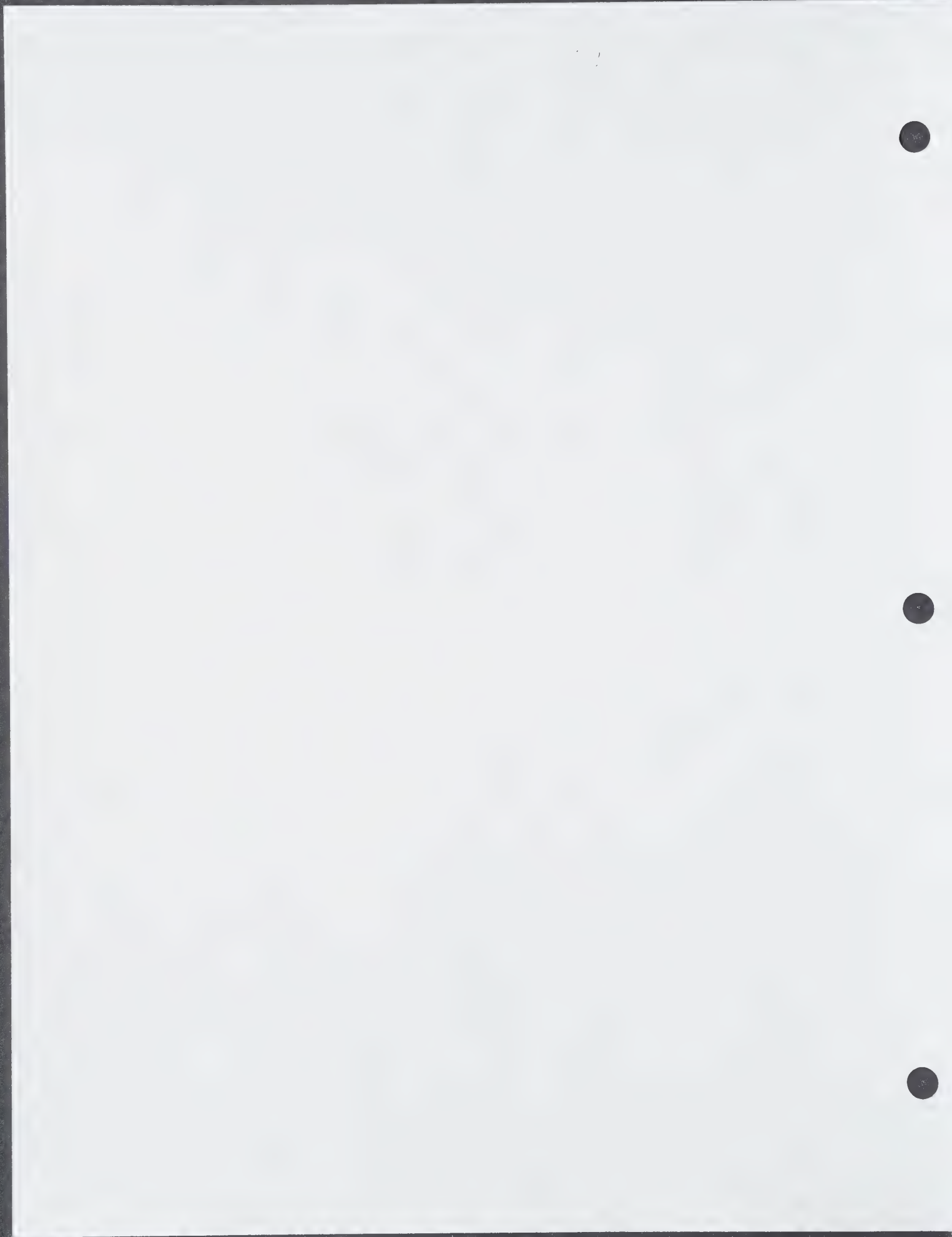
It is a very beautiful painting, and one filled with charm and vitality. I can understand how anyone might speculate about the painting's relation to the art of Velazquez. Nevertheless, I do not feel it is by him. It is no closer to his style than the work of any numbers of painters of the following generation whose styles were profoundly affected by Velazquez's. Although the free brush work in the modeling of the dog's body is reminiscent of Velazquez (that is what these artists were known for), the conception and execution of the landscape are quite different from his....Your painting does not appear to be a fragment but is instead an intimate portrait of a dog. As such it departs from any painting known to have been painted by Velazquez....The one artist who is known to have painted such pictures of animals is José Antolínez (1635-1675), one of the extremely talented generation of younger artists who followed Velazquez at the Court and who are regrettably too little known by the general public today.



A beautiful painting, in fine condition, painted by whom? Velazquez or José Antolínez? The difference in value was a million dollars or two.

George Gordon, Senior Director of Old Master Paintings at Sotheby's in London, conducts some of the auctions in New York as well as London, and over the years we have become very good friends. He is always as kind and helpful as he is knowledgeable about old masters, and so I showed him this portrait of a dog and mentioned the varied opinions I had had. He thought that there was a good chance that it could be by Velazquez. The key would be the opinion of the world expert on that artist, Professor Perez-Sanchez in Madrid. And so, in April 2000, we signed an agreement that Sotheby's would ship the painting to Madrid for Professor Perez-Sanchez's opinion. If he said yes, Sotheby's would offer it as a Velazquez. If no, Sotheby's would try to ascertain the correct name and offer it as such. I suggested that Sotheby's insure it for \$1 million, a modest price for a Velazquez in great condition. But George explained that a courier would have to accompany a million dollar painting, at considerable expense. The maximum that Sotheby's would insure it at its expense was \$150,000, and so, not being a prophet, I agreed.

The specialist of Spanish paintings at Sotheby's, James Macdonald, who was to liaise between the Madrid office and Professor Perez-Sanchez, faxed me on 12 January 2001, "As you are aware the painting is currently safely stored in our office in Madrid. Sadly Professor Perez-Sanchez had to cancel my meeting with him during my last sojourn to Spain, however he has kindly agreed to come into the office on Monday of next week (15 January) to inspect the picture. Although I will not be there in person I



will discuss the matter with him over the telephone.” “Safely stored” until Professor Perez-Sanchez’s visit on January 15. But on Saturday, 13 January, Sotheby’s office was broken into and our dog and some other works of art were stolen.

The insurance agent, Iain Fairley International, advertised the theft, offering a reward, as did the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR) Journal - all to no avail.

Sotheby’s insurance paid us \$150,000 - with the understanding that if the painting should be recovered within five years, we would have the option to purchase it for \$150,000. Were it recovered after five years, we would have the option of acquiring it for \$150,000 “in addition to a reasonable sum to reflect interest and expenses relating to recovery.” The five years have passed, and we haven’t yet had to make the decision whether we want to repurchase it.

The payment of \$150,000 gave us a “profit” of close to \$70,000, half of this Janet’s. But Christophe had turned his interest over to a former business partner, Paolo Affif, resident in Ireland. Affif told me that Janet owed him a considerable sum of money and was hoping that our gem would yield a great deal. So at first, Affif decided not to accept the half “profit” but hope for its recovery and sale. But eventually, in September 2002, he decided that a bird in hand is better than two in the bush and accepted his share of the “profit”, \$34,646.00.

Will I ever know whether I owned a real Velazquez? Probably not.

Sargent and Lely

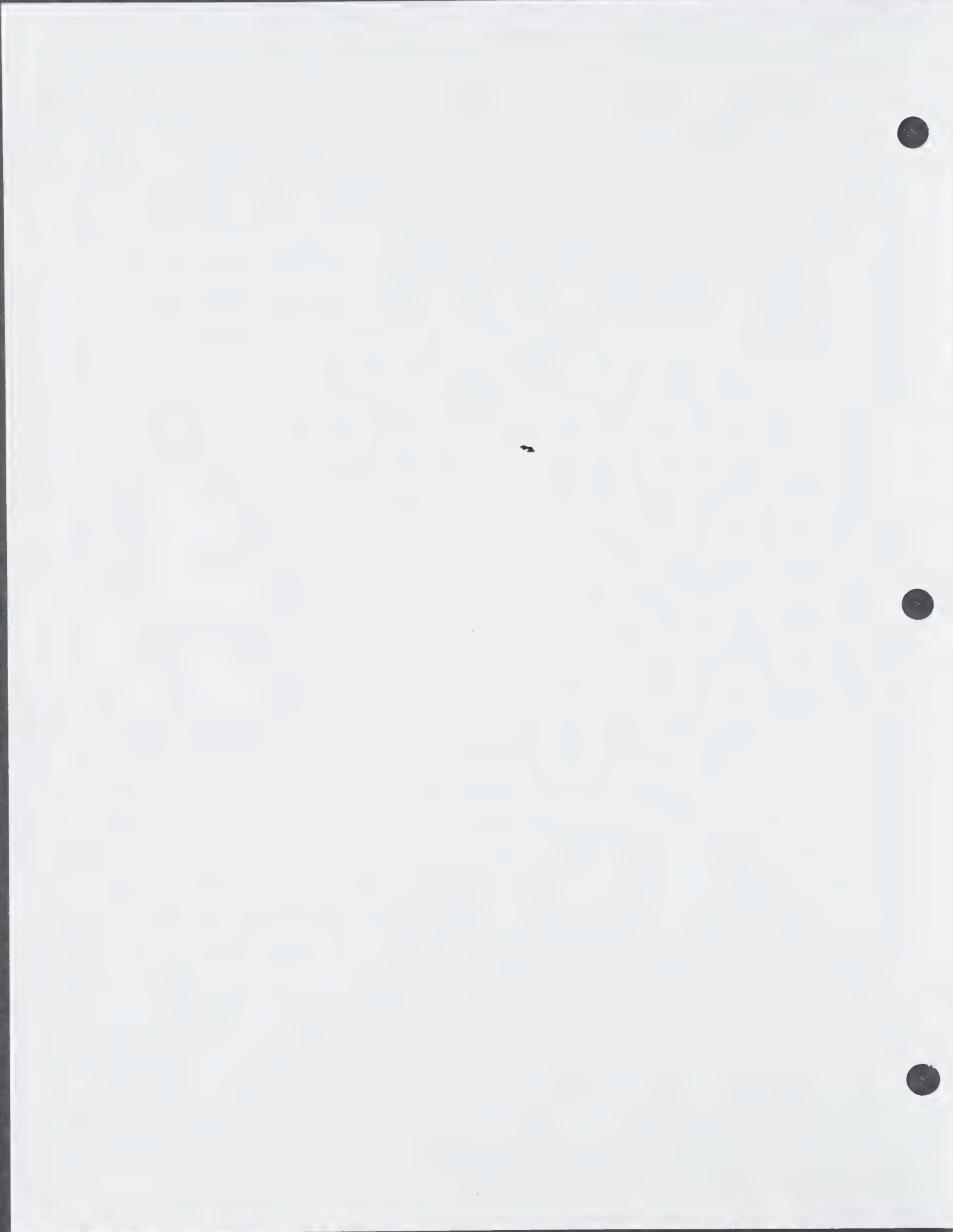


There probably are times in the lives of most of us when we simply do not know what to decide. The most serious time of indecision in my life was after I received Isabel's letter #82 on 15 August 1951, the first letter I had received since September 1950. I didn't know what to do and I made the wrong decision - if I had decided to fly to Canada before she returned to England on 22 August, our lives might have been so different!

With paintings there often is indecision. Should I bid, should I take a chance despite all that overpaint? But the greatest indecision in my life regarding a painting was totally different, lasted only half an hour, and solved itself.

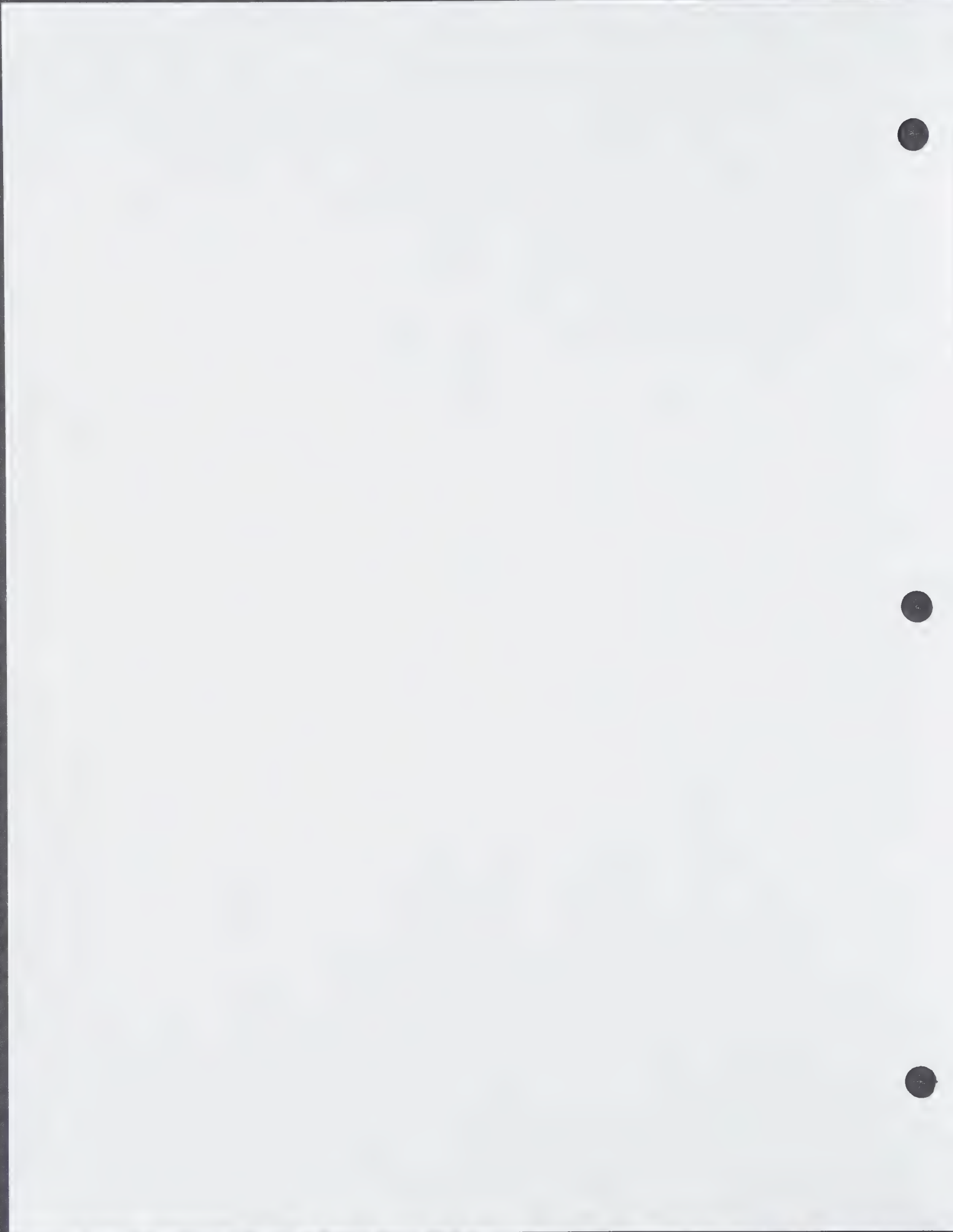
In December 2001, Philip Mould of Historical Portraits in London told me of a magnificent portrait ^(fig.) of Arthur James Balfour painted by John Singer Sargent for the Carlton Club in London in 1908. The large canvas, 101" x 58", was exhibited in the Royal Academy that year, and G.K. Chesterton described it in the *Art Journal*:

By far the most important thing in the exhibition, by the perspective of history, is Mr. Sargent's portrait of Mr. Balfour....Mr. Sargent's most sympathetic portrait is also one of his most sagacious....It is the portrait of a philosopher and a statesman....Mr. Sargent has left on canvas the record of what was worst at the end of the nineteenth century, after the death of Gladstone and the great crusades: the brazen fashion, the foul finance. Here, perhaps he has left forever the record of what was best in it.



The National Portrait Gallery published an appeal for funds, briefly describing the life of Arthur Balfour. But to me, Balfour had an importance not mentioned in this appeal: he was the father of the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, in which the British government expressed its support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The best verbal description of Balfour I had ever seen was a study by Pierre van Paassen written in 1925 when Balfour and Chaim Weizmann, later the first president of Israel, traveled to Palestine for the opening of the Hebrew University. Van Paassen wrote:

Well may one ask, what stirred this strange, often lethargic, more often incomprehensible figure, at one time called 'the Eternal Nay' in the Irish Home Rule question, - what moved him to champion the cause of the Jewish people at the Versailles conference and become their advocate in the councils of humanity in the days that followed?...A review of his life would show that only the most profound questions of human activity, only the most momentous events, have ever been able to stir Lord Balfour into anything approaching enthusiasm...Logic, force and dignity are his weapons...There are no sentimental reasons attached to his visit. He is not rejoicing primarily over the happy ending of two thousand years of exile for the Jewish people. He is not inhumane or insensitive, but to him 'the existence of man is a mere accident', and the mass of mankind is necessarily doomed to hard and unthankful, unremitting toil, and the struggles of the past must be repeated in ages to come. It is because the People of the Book will again begin an era of conscious, creative, scientific effort, that he is interested.



The best visual description of Balfour was John Singer Sargent's, and I hoped to buy it with Philip Mould.

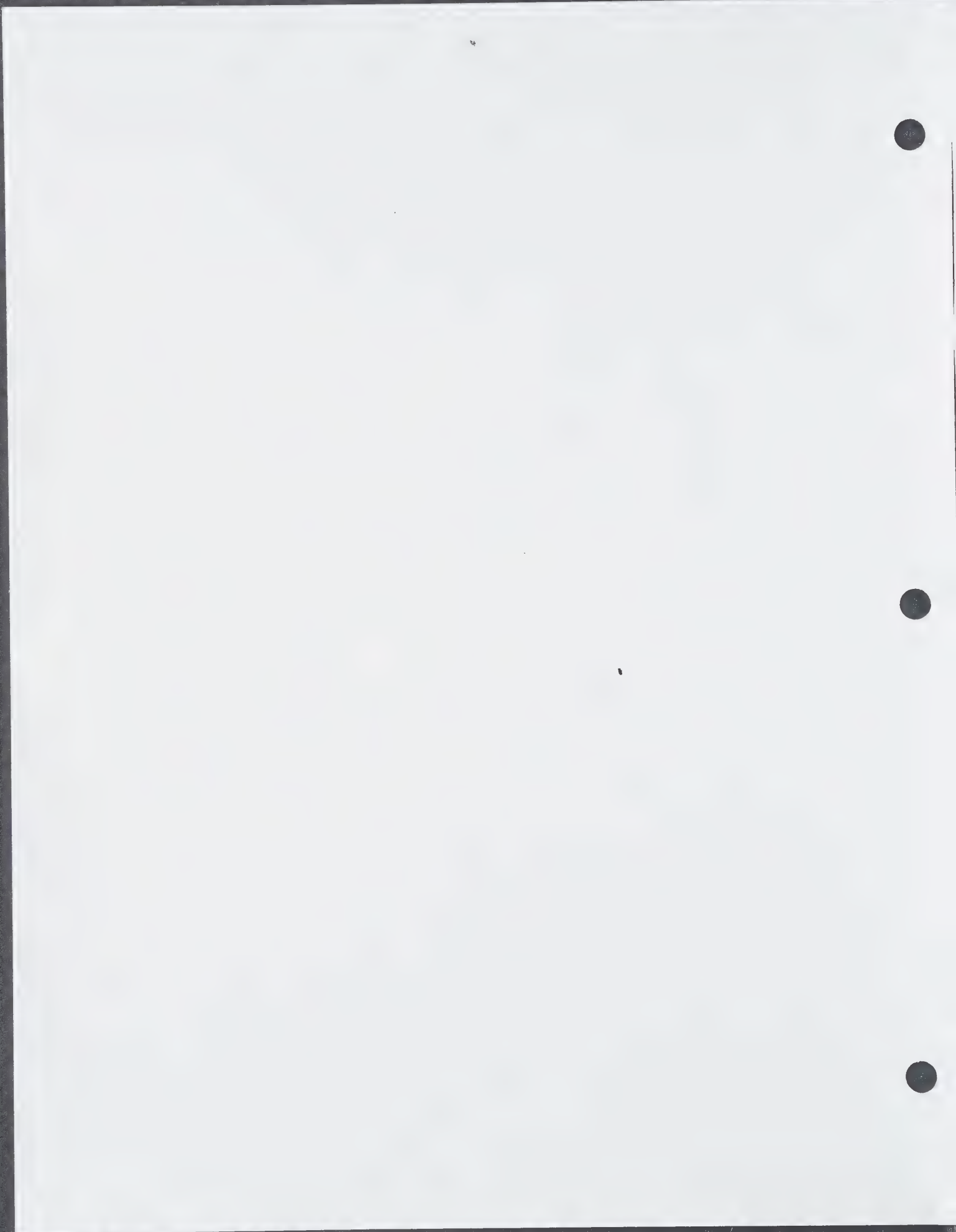
Arriving at a contract with Arthur Ackerman and Peter Johnson Limited, the company representing the Carlton Club, was not easy, but finally on 22 March 2002, I signed the contract. This called for the painting to be offered to the National Portrait Gallery in London for £900,000, open for acceptance by the NPG until 5 p.m. Friday, 19 July 2002. If not accepted, I would have to pay £900,000 by the next day.

Philip Mould thought it touch and go that the NPG would be able to raise the funds so, on my request, he prepared an invoice in the event that they should not. I wire transferred the £900,000 to Philip's London account so that he could pay the Carlton Club's agents immediately after the painting became mine at 5 p.m. that Friday.

On 15 July, the NPG e-mailed to its major supporters:

The portrait is contracted to be sold to an American buyer unless we can find £900,000. It would be a marvelous acquisition for the Gallery and we have come a great way to achieving this total. Jacob Simon, our Acting Director, has had some wonderful results including support from the Art Fund, Christopher Ondaatje, Lord Sieff's legacy and funding from the Gallery's own acquisition fund. In total we have raised £551,000 but the Carlton Club has only given the Gallery until 19th July to secure the purchase.

At 3:30 on Friday, 19 July, I stopped at Historical Portraits, Philip's gallery on Dover Street just off Piccadilly, and was told that Jacob Simon, the Chief Curator and

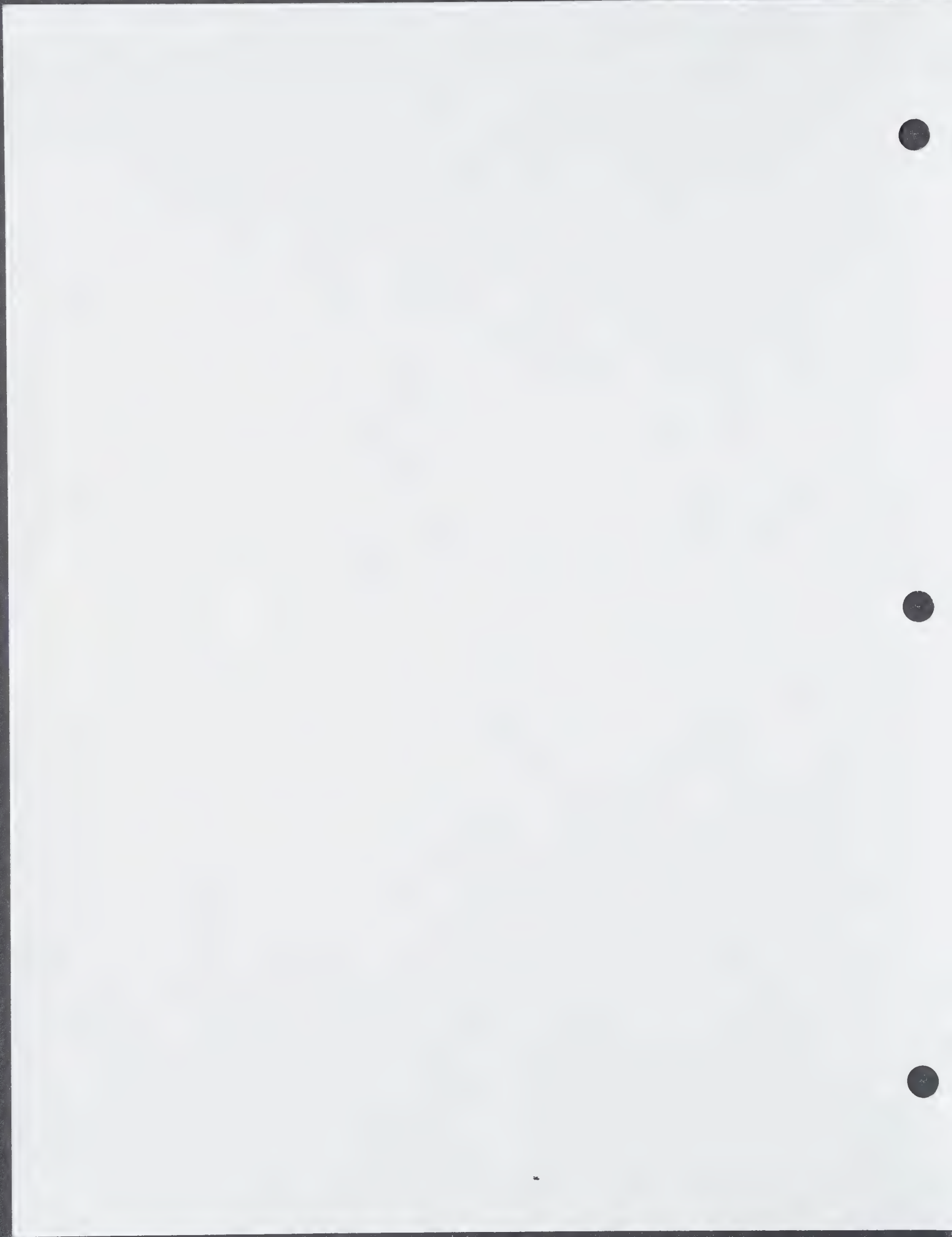


Acting Director of the NPG, was inviting me to tea at the National Portrait Gallery at 4:30. Philip thought that the Gallery had come close to raising the £900,000 and would ask me to extend the deadline to the following week. Would I/should I extend the deadline? As I walked down St. James, past Christie's to Pall Mall and past the National Gallery, I thought of nothing else and also mused that my indecision was so much less important than my indecision in August in 1951. I was sorry that Isabel was not with me - she had stayed in Bexhill - I would have loved to follow her advice. Finally, as I entered the National Portrait Gallery, around the corner from the National Gallery, I decided that the way Jacob Simon asked for an extension would decide me. If really friendly, yes; if demanding, no. I need not have worried. Jacob Simon turned out to be very friendly and his first words to me were, "I am very happy to be able to tell you that just this last hour we have succeeded in raising the balance needed."

On 23 July, *The Times* wrote, "Portrait is saved. One of the greatest portraits of a Prime Minister has been rescued for the nation at the eleventh hour." I was tempted to write to *The Times* that it was really the twelfth hour less one minute.

On 26 July, Jacob Simon sent me a very friendly letter asking me whether I might like to fund a research project on Jewish Iconography through a Bader Fellowship in the History of Portraiture and ended with, "The acquisition of the Balfour portrait has been an extraordinary episode in my career and I am delighted that it has led our paths to cross. I look forward to welcoming you at the National Portrait Gallery on a future occasion."

The National Portrait Gallery is a fine place for the portrait. If Philip Mould and I had acquired it, we would almost certainly have loaned it to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. I had been in Israel in April and had mentioned to Shlomit Steinberg, the



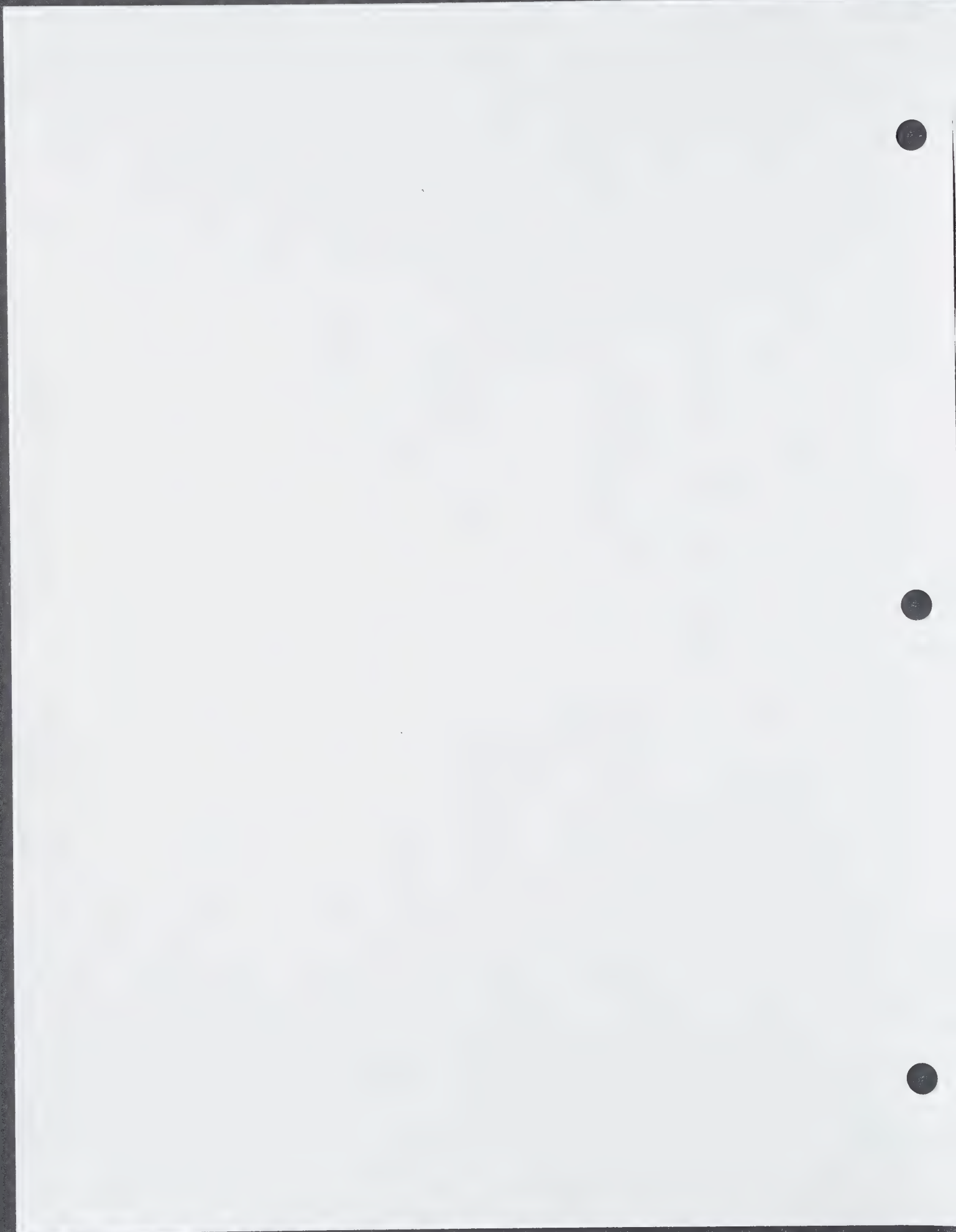
Curator of the Museum, that the painting of Balfour was for sale and that I hoped to buy it. She later wrote asking if I would lend it, "to display it in our portrait gallery in front of the English dining room. This way there is a possibility that one of our donors will see how wonderfully it fits the collection and will buy it for us" I replied that "you should never sell the skin until you have the bear."

Is London or Jerusalem the better place for this great portrait? I really do not know, though I think it would be admired more in Jerusalem because Balfour was so pivotal to the history of Israel. I would love to have owned the Sargent of Balfour, but it has gone to a good home, and I share Jacob Simon's delight that our paths have crossed. I shall certainly visit the National Portrait Gallery more often to see the Sargent, and I have gotten to know and like Jacob Simon much better.

Our paths soon crossed, with a totally different painting.

In 2001, Philip Mould and I learned that Christie's London was offering in a private sale one of Sir Peter Lely's finest portraits, that of Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, and her son as the *Madonna and Child* ^(fig.). I purchased this in July 2001 for a bid price of £150,000 which, with premium and VAT, came to £177,187.50, or a little more than \$250,000 at that time. The painting was one of the finest portraits in the National Portrait Gallery's *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, which was also shown at Yale. Philip and I hoped that one of these museums or one of Philip's other customers would purchase this masterpiece.

After first meeting Jacob Simon at the National Portrait Gallery on that fateful Friday afternoon, I asked him why the Gallery was not interested in the Lely and was astounded by his reply: "We could not, and I believe no museum could be interested in



its purchase, because Christie's cannot provide satisfactory documentation for 1939-1945."

John Stanton, the Director of British Art at Christie's, had written to us, "The research that we have undertaken has not revealed any additional provenance for the picture, neither have we become aware, in the course of that research, of anything which suggests a specific problem in relation to the provenance. We have in addition consulted the Art Loss Register, who has confirmed that they are not aware of any claims in relation to the picture." But this was not enough for the National Portrait Gallery, and Christie's would not supply more information. And so Philip and I decided to offer this portrait for auction at Christie's London on 24 November 2004, with a reserve of £150,000, hoping of course that it would bring much more. But it failed to sell, and so I offered it to the National Portrait Gallery at the net price I would have received, had it sold at its reserve. After yet further research into the provenance it accepted my offer, subject to the NPG being able to raise the funds. Its effort was successful, and I was paid £147,000 or a little more than \$270,000 in May 2005. The National Portrait Gallery purchased one of Lely's greatest portraits at less than it would have had to pay Christie's. Because of the rising value of the pound, I didn't lose money, and I learned about the importance of provenance research.

How many of the paintings I have bought during the last fifty-five years had been stolen by the Nazis? David de Witt, the Bader Curator at Queen's, looked into this very carefully and at first feared that one of the most beautiful paintings we have given to Queen's, Jan Lievens' *Portrait of an Old Woman*, perhaps Rembrandt's mother, may have been stolen from the estate of a Jewish dealer, J. Goudstikker, and sold in an auction



in Berlin in 1940. But then we found, to our great relief, that the provenance of two versions of the painting was mixed up in the catalog of the great Lievens exhibition in Braunschweig in 1979. The other version had belonged to Goudstikker. There was no indication whatever that the Nazis might have stolen the Lely, but even the absence of proof of ownership during the war years discouraged unseen buyers.

Lot and his Daughters

Gui Rochat, a dealer friend specializing in French paintings and who recognized its quality, drew my attention to an enormous canvas - 66" x 92" - lot 24, in Sotheby's New York sale on 22 January 2004. The painting of *Lot and His Daughters* ^(fig.), attributed to Hendrick Bloemaert, had been sent to the auction by a club in Des Moines, Iowa, where it had hung in its dining room.

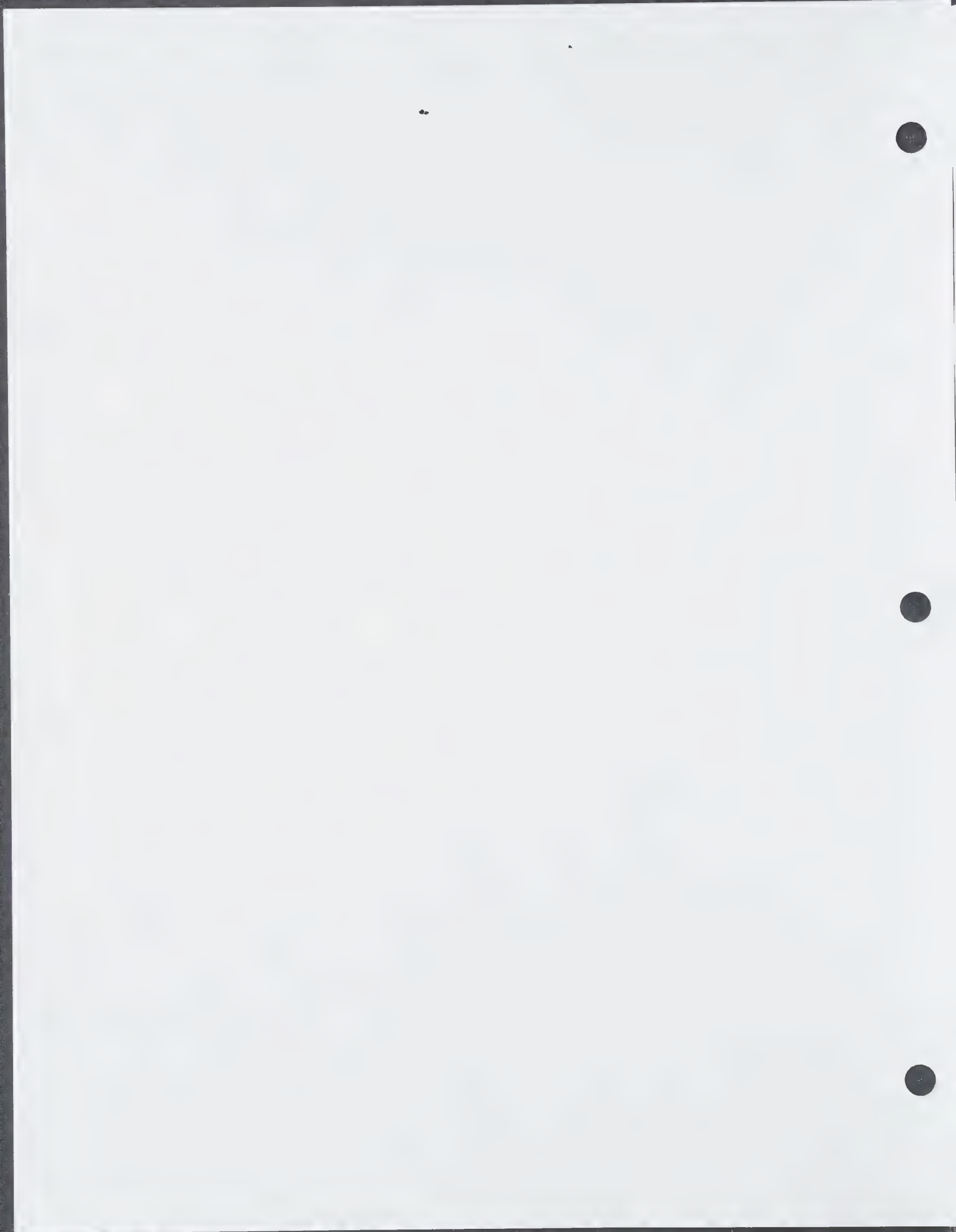
Although Isabel and I often go to New York auctions in January, we go only when there are paintings I feel I have to have, and there were none such that week. But the *Lot* intrigued me. The quality seemed superb; not just the voluptuous daughters but also the wonderful still life with a large pitcher, which reminded me of Adam Van Vianen and the fruit very much resembled that of Jan Davidsz. de Heem. The painting was very dirty and looked Flemish. I thought that it might be an early Johann Liss, an artist I like a lot. Years ago, I had bought one of his greatest works at Christie's in London but then was treated very unfairly by the British Heritage Committee (see Chapter 6) and could not get an export permit. Perhaps this was another opportunity to buy a beautiful Liss.



I knew that George Gordon was going to conduct the sale, and then visit us for a restful weekend in Milwaukee. I called Sotheby's in New York and arranged with Ben Hall that he would call me in Milwaukee the morning of the sale so that I could bid by phone. I had already talked to Otto Naumann and knew that he liked the image, but he had no room in his gallery for such a large painting and did not intend to bid. I had decided that my limit would be \$200,000 - but I was lucky. The size must have discouraged others, for bidding was slow and I could hear George knocking it down to me for only \$75,000, for a total cost of \$90,000 after the buyer's premium was added.

I was delighted with my buy, but what was I going to do with it? Certainly not have it sent to my conservators. Charles Munch and Jane Furchgott, who have conserved most of the paintings in my collection, could not take it - their truck and their vacuum table are too small. Fortunately Gui suggested a conservator in lower Manhattan, Michael Heidelberg, who gave me a not-to-exceed price of \$40,000 for the conservation. Wow! More than twice what I had ever paid for any conservation - but then, think of the size! Richard Charlton-Jones and George Gordon suggested sending the canvas to London where conservation would cost about half as much. But there was such an advantage to having the work done in New York where Gui could keep a close eye on it and help with any problems as they came along.

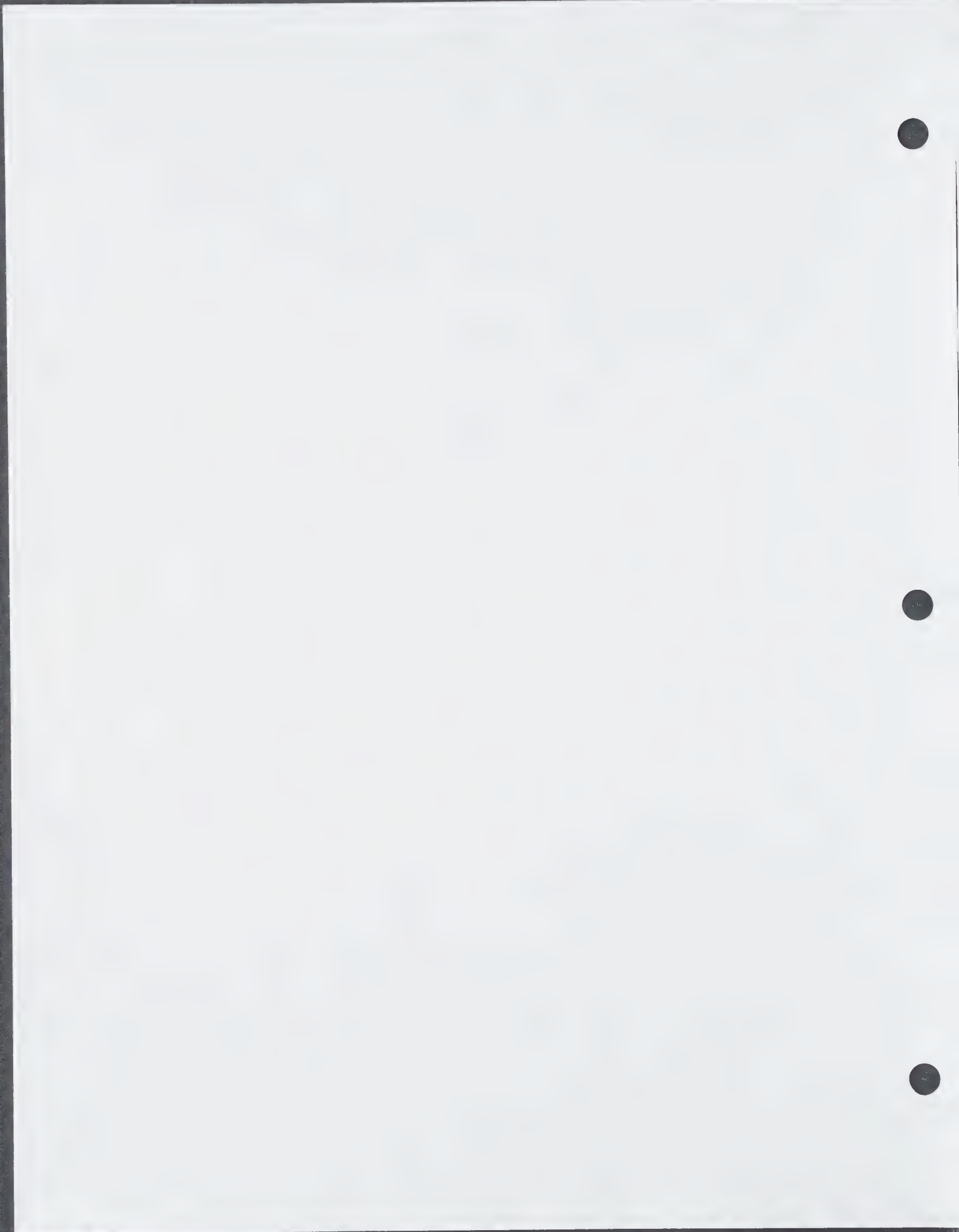
The first problem came at once: the truck Gui first considered was too small. I asked Ben Hall how had this ever come from Holland to a club in Des Moines? He promised to try to find out but has not succeeded. Gui finally found a trucker who could help, and the conservator received the painting on a snowy Wednesday, January 28. Carrying such a behemoth up three flights to the conservator was not easy. Carrying a



Steinway would have been more difficult, but perhaps not much. Just two days later, on the Friday, Michael called Gui and me in great excitement. Under the later inscription P.P. Rubens, on the lower right, was the genuine two line inscription A. Bloemaert fe. 1624! And Michael was certain that the painting would clean beautifully.

At almost 80, I still had a lot to learn. I had thought the painting to be Flemish, perhaps an early Liss; instead, it is the finest, most Rubensian Bloemaert I have ever seen. More good news was on the way. An old friend in Rotterdam, Hubert van Baarle, is most interested in Abraham Bloemaert and was really excited when I told him about this painting. A few days later he wrote that on February 14, 1811, "A. Bloemaert *Lot and His Daughters*, a grand gallery picture [formerly in the collection of Charles II], "was sold in London for £39.18, the highest price an Abraham Bloemaert fetched at the time. "A grand gallery picture" indeed!

Of course, Abraham Bloemaert's work is well known to me - or at least I thought so, just not well enough to recognize the *Lot* as his work. I had bought a fine *St. Jerome Working by Candlelight* many years ago in Holland. And then, in the preview of Christie's sale in South Kensington on 7 December 7 1995, I had seen a dirty, unframed canvas described as "After Abraham Bloemaert *The Dream of Jacob*" and estimated at £2,000-3,000. The original was thought to be with a dealer in London where I had already seen it, and I liked this "copy", dirt and all, much better. I was the only bidder in the room, but was bidding against someone on the telephone, who was almost as stubborn as I was - I had to go to a hammer price of £17,000! My friends Jane Furchgott and Charles Munch did a fine job cleaning and relining my painting, and I thought that this was the finest Abraham Bloemaert I could ever own (fig.).



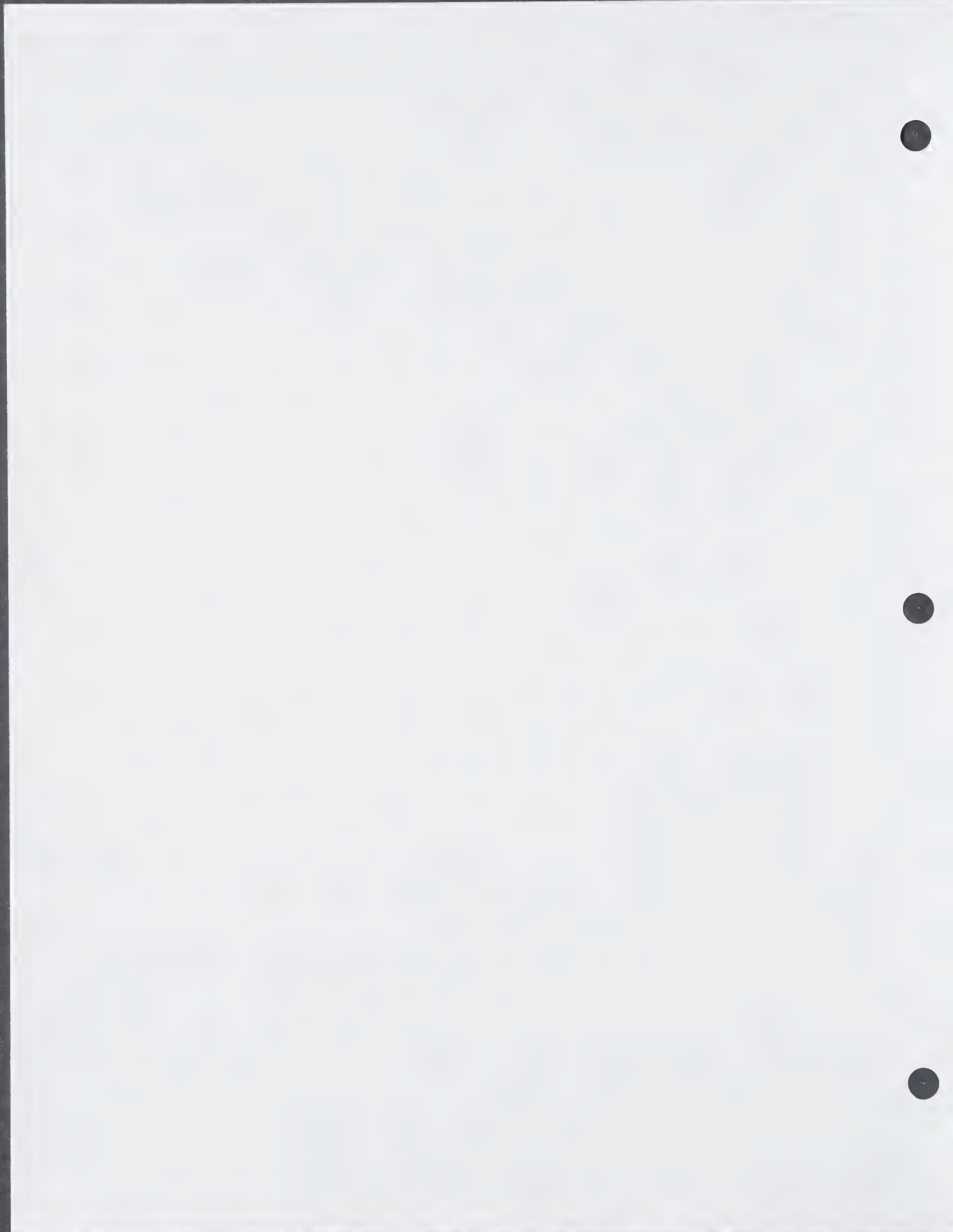
Years earlier, in 1976, I had written about *Jacob's Dream* for *The Bible Through Dutch Eyes*, an exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Center:

The vision of a ladder with angels going up and down on it is unique in Biblical imagery, and so *Jacob's Dream* has aroused artists' imaginations for centuries. The Bible is the book of dreams, par excellence: dreams of individuals, dreams of a people, dreams of all mankind. It is surely no accident that the very first well-known dream in the Bible is not that of a king or of a general but of a man at the lowest point in his life - homeless and hunted, yearning for God's promise that He would return him to his country.

How often had I thought of *Jacob's Dream* while in the prisoner of war camp in Canada? That dream is especially meaningful to me.

The great expert on Bloemaert is Professor Marcel Roethlisberger at the University of Geneva, who has published the two-volume catalogue raisonné on the artist. He is a most helpful scholar and so, naturally, I sent him photographs of my new acquisition. He replied,

I am much interested to see how *Jacob's Ladder* has come out. I saw the painting at the sale viewing in London. As you know it was quite dirty, fine in some area and abraded in others: I felt it was difficult to know what was underneath, but it looked interesting and seemed worth a try. I mentioned it to nobody, nor did anybody ask me, to my surprise. I could not stay for the sale but it was indeed I



who bid on the phone, not suspecting that it was against you, otherwise I would have abstained.

In an article titled "Abraham Bloemaert: Recent Additions to His Paintings", Professor Roethlisberger published my *Jacob's Dream*.

The *Lot and His Daughters* is, I believe, in a class by itself - certainly the best of Bloemaert's works that I have ever seen. When Professor Roethlisberger saw it in New York in 2006, he called it a magnificent painting. He was particularly impressed by the beautiful still life, exceptional for the artist.

Rubens

The first painting I ever bought at auction was an oil on canvas ^(fig.) depicting an old woman with a basket, shielding a candle with her hand, purchased for £28 at Sotheby's in London during my honeymoon, on 23 July 1952. This lot 153 was just called Jordaens, not Jacob Jordaens, not even J. Jordaens, indicating that Sotheby's did not think it really was by Jordaens. The seller, Lord Mackintosh of Halifax, wrote to me,

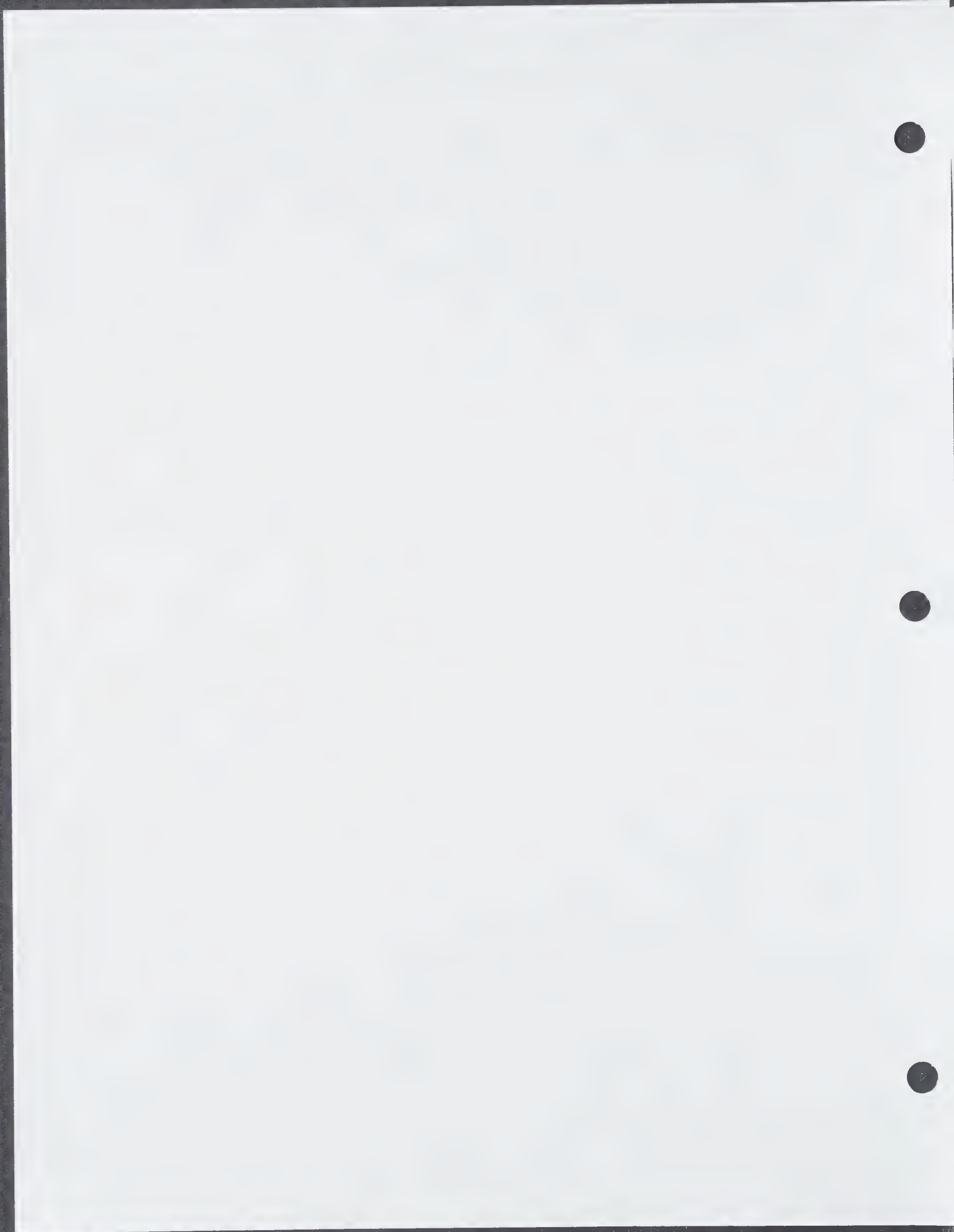
I bought this picture in London nearly thirty years ago and always thought it was by Wright of Derby, but of course you know he specialized in candle-light pictures. I sent it with another Wright of Derby to the Bi-centenary exhibition in his native town of Derby. The authorities there said it was a Jacob Jordaens and showed it as such in the Exhibition and it has always been accepted as such ever since.



But it wasn't by Wright of Derby or by Jacob Jordaens; nor was it by Rubens, as Professor Erik Larsen stated in an expertise he wrote in 1956. It was an old copy after a painting on panel by Rubens which was on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston between 1948 and 1965. Still, I enjoyed looking at my painting, but did eventually give it to a school in Milwaukee, which sent it to a local auction in November 1965 where it sold for \$7,000. The school was happy and so was I. In 1952, I could have bought a better painting, an original, for £28, but we all make mistakes, and hopefully we learn as we live.

Fifty one years later, when I went to London to view the old master sales at Sotheby's in December 2003, George Gordon showed me the Rubens original that he hoped would come up for sale in July. What a difference between this original and my copy! The original ^(fig.) includes a boy lighting a candle from that of the old woman and shows a clear pentiment of the old woman's left hand, which had originally been painted in a higher position. Rubens produced this night piece around 1616 and etched the subject around 1621. The counterproof of the first state is inscribed in his hand, in Latin, and translates to "Light can be taken a thousand times from another light without diminishing it." The work is on five pieces of wood, a clear indication that Rubens painted this not for sale but for his own enjoyment, and it is included, as no. 125, in the posthumous inventory of pictures found in his house in 1640.

I told George Gordon how much I liked this original and recounted the story of the old woman with a candle, the first painting I had ever bought at auction. In March 2004, he confirmed that the Rubens would be included in Sotheby's London sale on the evening of 7 July 2004, and would be exhibited before then in New York, where Otto

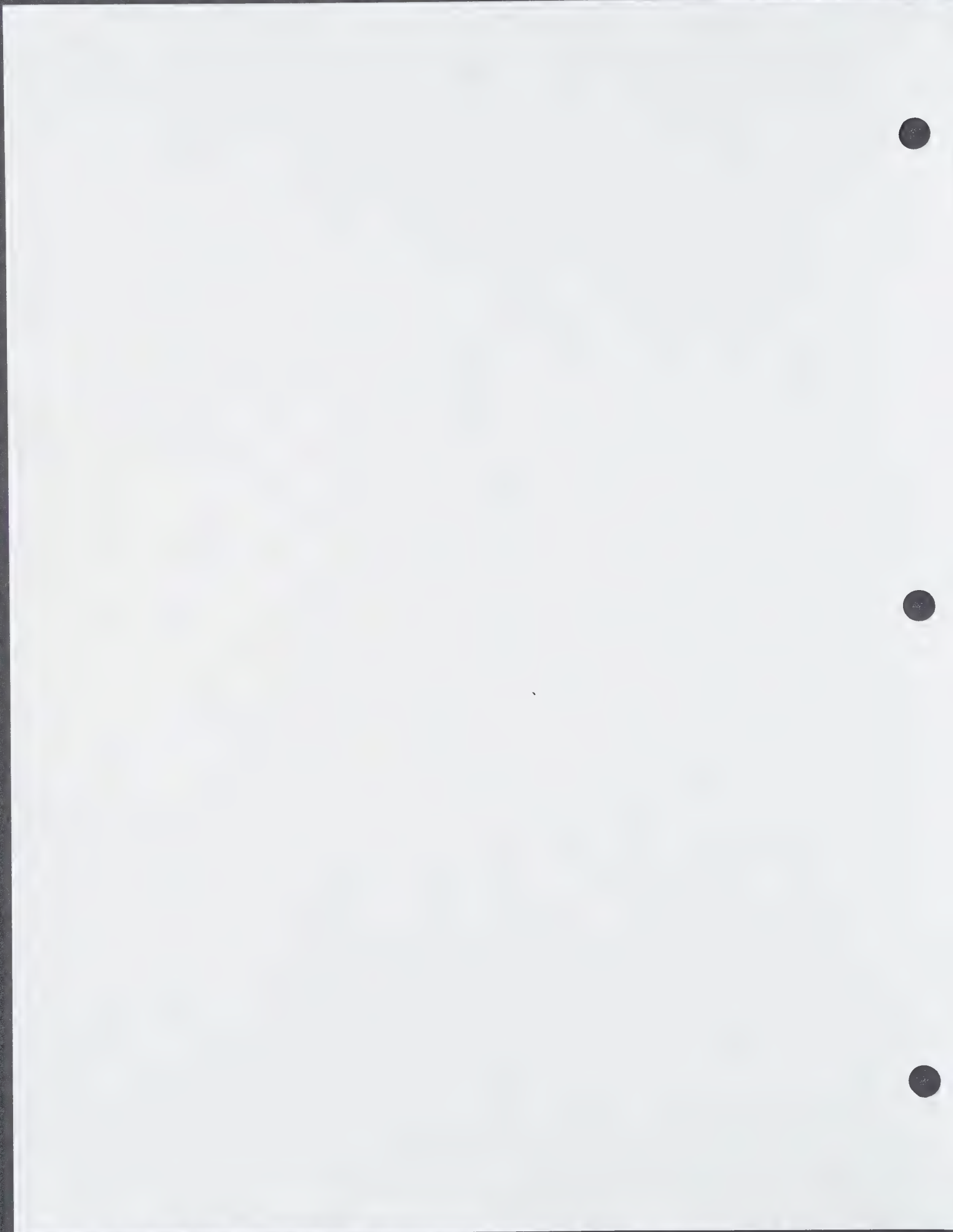


Naumann was able to examine it carefully.

Sotheby's catalog described the painting, lot 30, in six carefully written pages with three photographs. Among the many copies, mine in Milwaukee was included. I simply could not understand the estimate, only £2-3 million. Two years earlier, on July 10, 2002, Rubens' *Massacre of the Innocents*, wonderfully well painted but a ghastly subject, had sold for a hammer price of £45 million. I would much rather look at this wonderful night scene - one of Rubens' few night scenes - and, like the *Massacre*, painted entirely by Rubens, without workshop involvement but for his own enjoyment. Otto thought that he could sell it profitably if we could buy it for £4 million, but I doubted that it would sell that inexpensively.

As at the sale of the *Massacre of the Innocents* in 2002, Henry Wyndham was the auctioneer. Once again the room was packed, not in anticipation of the Rubens this time, but of lot 8, a small painting described as the last Vermeer not in a museum. I did not like the painting and was rather surprised when Rob Noortman told me on the day of the sale that he wanted to buy it. He was indeed the underbidder to the purchaser, Stephen Wynn, who bid by phone. The hammer price was £16.2 million.

Tension in the salesroom eased after this and bidding was rather slow. A number of the paintings in the sale were bought back, but that wasn't going to happen to lot 30, the Rubens. However, there was only one other bidder, on the telephone, and Henry Wyndham knocked the Rubens down to me at £2.2 million, much to my happy surprise. Briefly I wondered whether I should keep this beautiful candle-light painting I had bought so inexpensively, but Otto, of course, was eager to sell and wanted it to go to the



Mauritshuis in The Hague. There it was described as a "Topstuk van Rubens", an exceptional painting by Rubens, which of course it is.

In the same sale was another painting that I found very beautiful, the head of an old man by Jan Lievens, from the collection of the late D.G. van Beuningen in Rotterdam. It was estimated at £200,000-300,000, but there were many bidders, two of them particularly determined. It finally went to Johnny Van Haeften (bidding with Richard Green) for £1,650,000, a record price for a Jan Lievens. With commission the price was well over \$3 million. I can't buy them all.

For years, I have been writing and lecturing about Jan Lievens, called "Ein Maler im Schatten Rembrandts", a painter in the shadow of Rembrandt. Well, I believe the shadow is in our minds. Lievens was a great painter and not just while working close to Rembrandt in Leiden. Over the last forty years, I have bought ten paintings by Lievens, most for just a few thousand dollars, and four of these ten I have given to Queen's. Some of them, one of Rembrandt's mother, for instance, and another of St. Paul, I like even better than the painting of the old man that brought a record price. My favorite is a late work, painted in the 1660s, a portrait of Jacob Junius. I am so happy to see Lievens coming out of Rembrandt's shadow, and I look forward to a Lievens exhibition which will go from the National Gallery in Washington to the Milwaukee Art Museum and then to the Rembrandt House.

Menzel

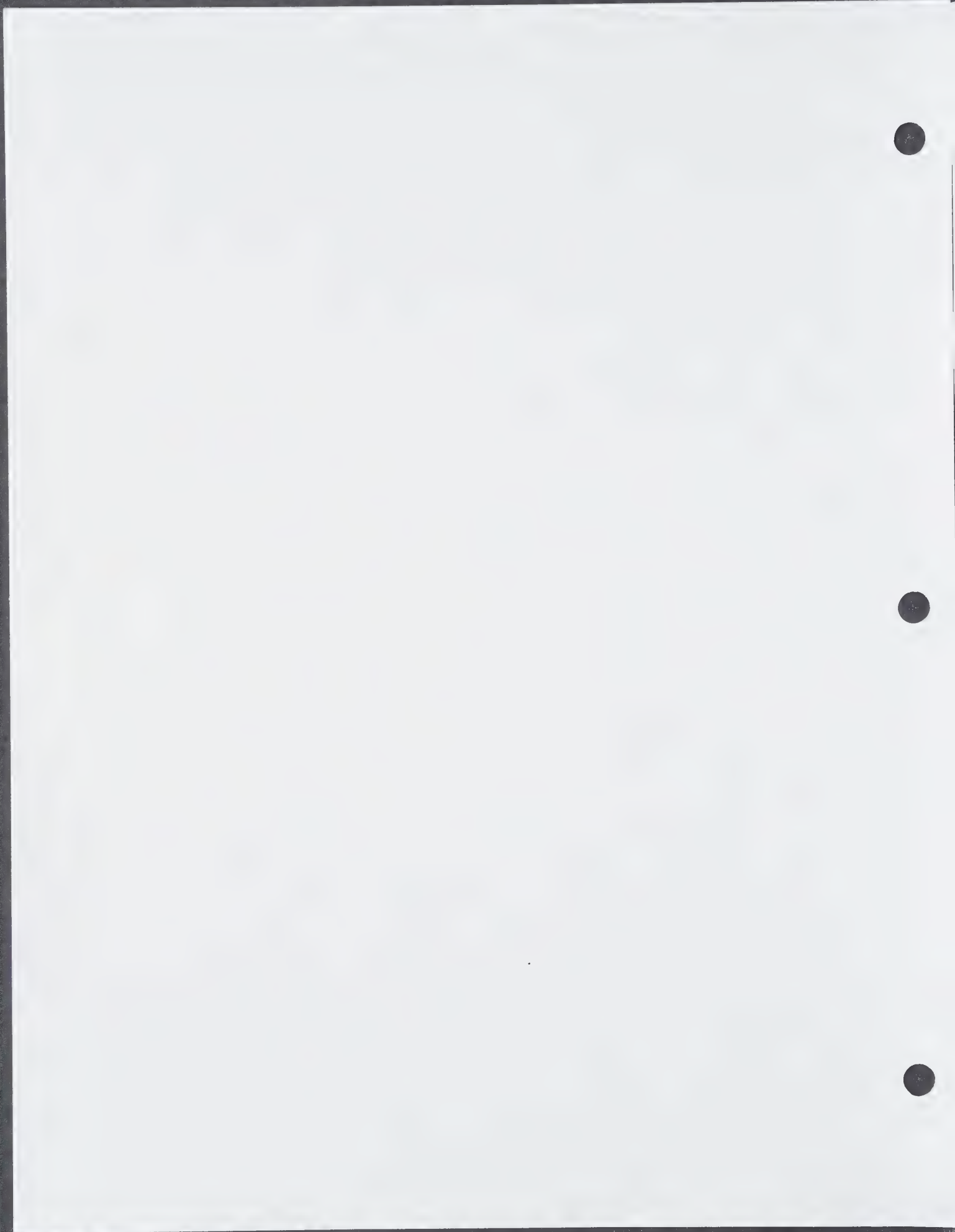
For some years, I have been working with an able gallery in Munich, the Galerie Arnoldi-Livie, owned by Angelika and Bruce Livie, she a charming Bavarian, he an



American of Scottish descent. Both are great fun to be with. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with them and greatly appreciate their wonderful hospitality every time we visit Munich. Isabel and I visit them each year, and we were all pleased when they sold two of ABFA's works to German museums.

I was very interested when Angelika told me about a most beautiful painting by Adolph von Menzel that was in the museum in Dresden but that might possibly be returned to the heirs of the previous owner, Estella Meyer, nee Goldschmidt. In 1935, Mrs. Meyer was forced to sell the painting to the museum in Dresden at a price well under its actual value. She was later deported to Auschwitz where she died in 1942. Menzel painted *Sunday Afternoon in the Tuileries Gardens* (fig.) in 1867, after he had visited Paris for the world exhibition. He may well have been inspired by Manet's *Concert in the Tuileries Gardens*, painted in 1860 and now in the National Gallery in London.

The Livies had been following the discussions about the return of the painting and thought that if Dresden did return it, the heirs might decide to sell. When they showed me the major books on the artist and I realized what a beautiful work it was, I agreed that I would be willing to consider purchasing it and would then entrust its sale to the Livies. Early in March 2005, Angelika and Bruce told me that the museum in Dresden had decided to agree to the restitution in order to avoid a lengthy lawsuit with the eight heirs, who were being helped greatly by the Jewish Claims Conference. However, it was important to the museum that the painting continue to be exhibited in Dresden until it was sold and that the eventual buyer, probably a museum, should consider returning it on loan from time to time in exchange for one of Dresden's great paintings. What museum, be it



the Metropolitan in New York or the National Gallery in London, would not be glad to show one of Dresden's wonderful Bellottos or some other of Dresden's great paintings?

Wishful thinking? Perhaps. But my hope was that this beautiful Menzel might go to London. I could just imagine how stunning Menzel's *Tuileries Gardens* would look next to the National Gallery's Manet of the same subject!

Hoping to avoid losing the Menzel, Dresden had made a tentative offer of one million Euros. I heard that Christie's in London was reported to have offered the heirs a three million Euros guarantee. The question was how quickly would they be paid and would the museum in Dresden be helped with a possible exchange? And with whom? We decided to make an offer, and while we were in Vienna the first week of June, Angelika called me and put me in touch with Dr Markus Stötzel, the heirs' lawyer near Marburg. In a very pleasant negotiation by telephone, we agreed on a price and then met Dr Stötzel in the Arnoldi-Livie gallery in Munich on June 15, signed the contract, and arranged for the prompt wire transfer of the funds.

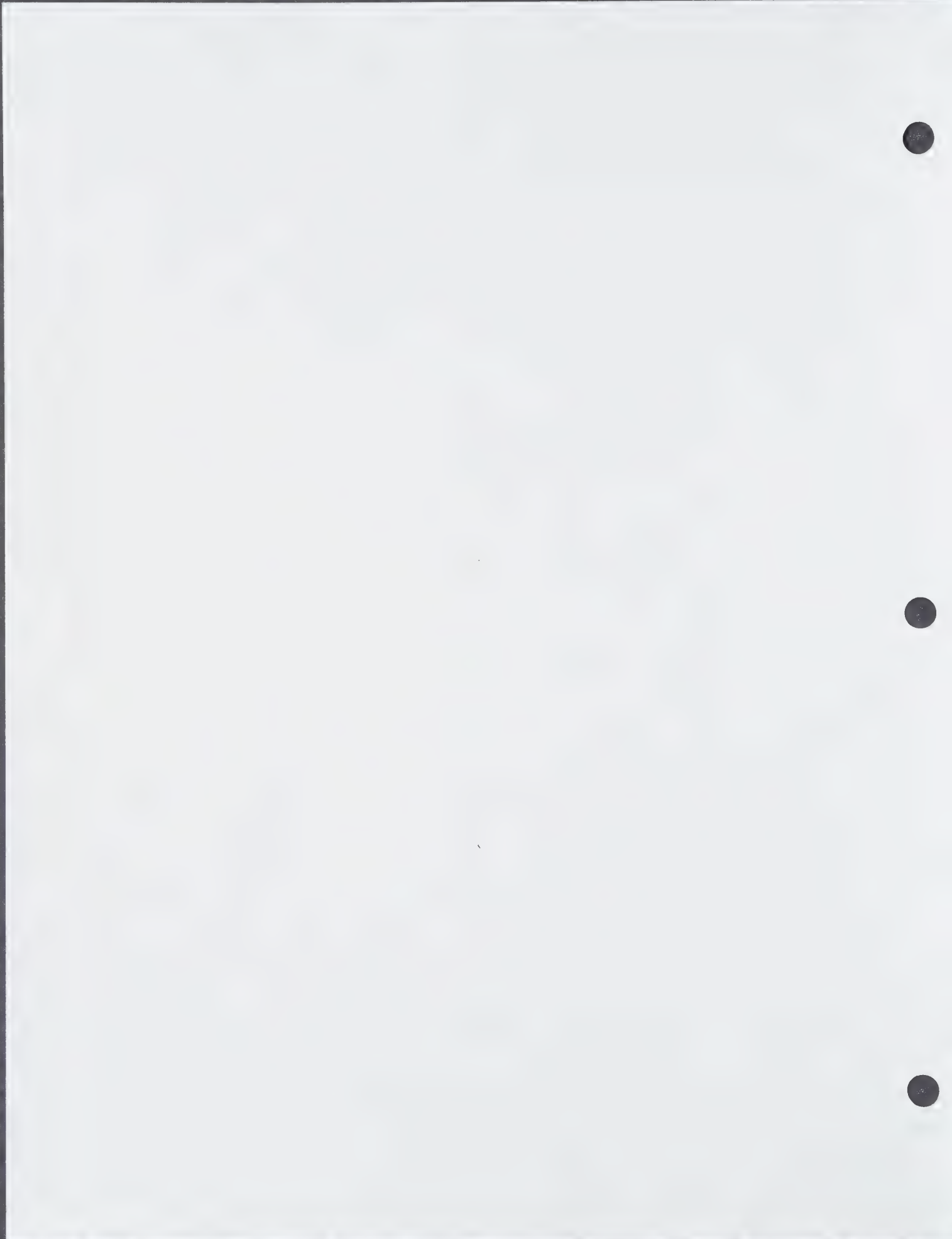
There followed a great deal of publicity, all of it correct and to me very surprising. The *Morgenpost* in Dresden even showed photographs of the Livies, of me as a thirteen-year-old, and with Isabel standing before Herstmonceux Castle - and even of a Bellotto in the museum in Dresden. The publicity was not limited to Dresden or to Saxony; even Germany's greatest newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, published an article on June 17! The gist of all the stories was that an eighty-one-year-old Jew, a dealer and collector, driven from Vienna in 1938, had helped the heirs, the museum in Dresden, and hopefully the museum that would acquire the painting.



Ende gut, Alles gut - after the Livies had found the right buyer. Or so I thought, though it did not turn out quite like that. The Livies found the ideal buyer - just as we had hoped - the National Gallery in London. Dr Christopher Riopelle, the curator of the Gallery's nineteenth century paintings, and two other curators flew to Dresden in October 2005, were welcomed at the museum, and shown the painting. They then asked that it be shipped to London where the Acquisition Committee of the National Gallery on November 3 voted 11:1 to acquire the Menzel at the price asked by the Livies. Dr Riopelle agreed to return the painting to Dresden for a Menzel exhibition opening at the end of November and thereafter to consider exchanging the Menzel from time to time with one of Dresden's masterpieces. The Livies and I had kept our promise.

Professor Dr Martin Roth, the Generaldirektor der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, had spoken highly of our plans. In an article in the *Sächsische Zeitung* in June, he was quoted, "When you consider Alfred Bader's tragic fate as a Nazi victim, then his actions are a great gesture of humanity, clearly symbolic to everyone. Alfred Bader is helping us to ensure that this world-class painting can be shown from time to time in our Galerie Neue Meister. We are deeply grateful to him for this." In July he invited me to come to Dresden to lecture and to express his thanks by showing me the Old Master Gallery personally.

I had already agreed to give two lectures in Vienna and to be at the second presentation of the Lieben Award (see Chapter 16) on November 4. The next week was free, and so I suggested that I come to Dresden to give four lectures. I would give "The Rembrandt Research Project and the Collector" and "The Bible Through Dutch Eyes" on the ninth of November; the latter, I believed, would be particularly fitting on the

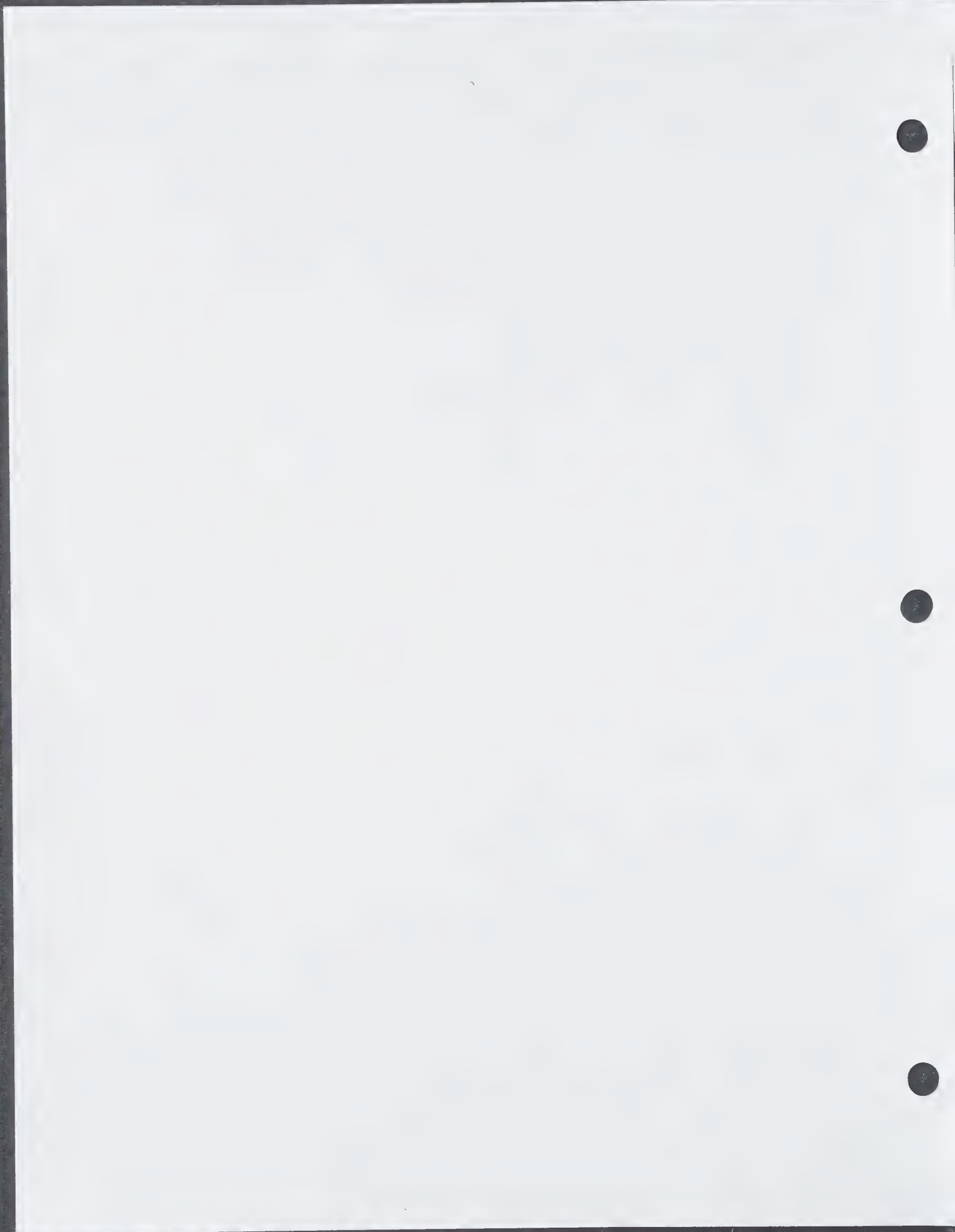


anniversary of Kristallnacht. The following day, I planned to give two lectures in the university's chemistry department. All was set: The museum booked a room in a pleasant hotel, and when Angelika Livie called me in Vienna on November 4 to tell me of the National Gallery's decision, I thought that my two lectures at the Dresden museum would also be a celebration of our dreams come true.

The next day I was staggered to receive a fax from Professor Roth telling me that I was no longer welcome to be the museum's guest. He had learned that we had sold the Menzel to the National Gallery in London without a legal contract for an exchange with Dresden. Naturally I responded immediately that Dr Riopelle had assured us that the National Gallery was happy to send the Menzel to Dresden at the end of the month, and to consider exchanges thereafter. No mention of a legal contract had ever been made. Professor Roth never replied to me.

The largest headline in the Dresdner *Morgenpost* of November 8 was "Riesenkraich um Millionen Menzel" (Great Fuss Over Menzel Worth Millions). In a full page article, Professor Roth accused the Livies and me of having mistreated the Museum in Dresden and even the eight heirs because we sold the painting at a profit. I had paid the heirs the sum they requested, about three times the one million Euros offered by the Museum in Dresden. I wish I knew exactly what motivated Professor Roth to act so irrationally. Other German newspapers, the *Sächsische Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* all wrote about this affair without explanation for Professor Roth's actions.

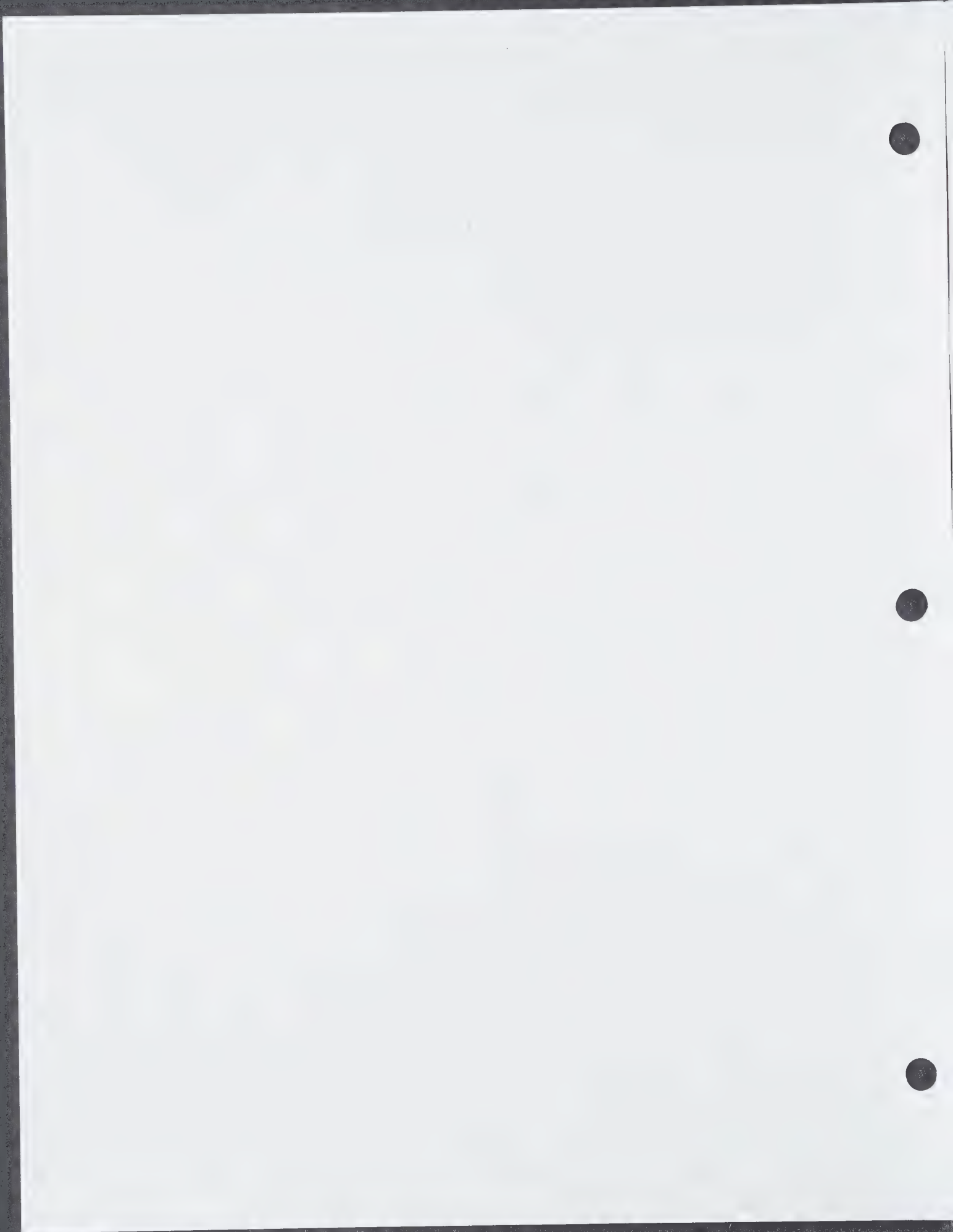
We did not cancel our flight to Dresden because we had the two lectures at the university, and despite all the brouhaha, spent a very pleasant day there. An old friend,



Dr Tomas Kucera, came from Berlin to listen to the lectures I couldn't give. We had not known he intended to come but were very glad to see him, since it was a long time since we had last met. His appearance was a really bright spark since we had been "disinvited". However, I did meet Dr Harald Marx, the Director of the Old Master Gallery, and we talked a good deal about the wonderful works of Rembrandt and his students in the Gallery. Of course, Dr Marx could not discuss the reasoning behind the Generaldirektor's actions, although clearly he was as puzzled as we were. In the afternoon, we visited the newly built synagogue, and in the evening we were treated to a most sumptuous dinner arranged by Paul Gerhard Babick and his wife, Dr Ute Babick Krüger, the historian working with the Jewish Claims Conference to recover paintings stolen by the Nazis.

The next day I gave the two talks in the Chemistry Department of the University. The audience was very small indeed because the Museum had told the university that the lectures had been cancelled. However, two journalists, Christiane Kohl of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and Birgit Grimm of the *Sächsische Zeitung*, came and then joined us for lunch after the lectures. They were very interested to hear the real story and wrote fair reports for their papers. We left Dresden for England early on Friday morning, still greatly puzzled by Professor Roth's actions.

Dr Christopher Riopelle of the National Gallery in London had invited me for lunch with Dr David Jaffé, the Senior Curator. When I went up to London the following week, they showed me the Menzel, my first look at this magnificent painting. They were delighted with it and perfectly agreeable to return it to Dresden for the Menzel exhibition opening later in the month and then to consider future exchanges. In fact, Dr Charles



Saumarez Smith, the Director of the National Gallery, flew to Dresden for discussions and a press conference on 25 November and was asked repeatedly whether he was satisfied with the purchase. Of course he was, yet Professor Roth reiterated that I had lied to him by promising a permanent loan to Dresden. Luckily, Christiane Kohl of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* had a copy of his 4 July letter to me in which he clearly approved of my intention to sell the Menzel. When she confronted him with this, he turned to his assistant and asked, "Did I really write this?"

I honestly wish I knew what made Professor Roth so angry. In an interview with the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, he expressed his doubts that an exchange with the National Gallery would take place and ended with, "If Bader loved art, he would give part of his profit to the Museum." No museum director has ever treated me so badly and yet he suggested that I help his museum financially. I wonder whether the word "chutzpah" is known in Dresden.

A few days later I met Dr Saumarez Smith for the first time. He is a charming man who knew a good deal about me because his curator of old masters, Dr Axel Rüger, studied at Queen's and was one of two editors of the Festschrift given to me for my eightieth birthday. Dr Saumarez Smith assured once again me that the National Gallery was interested in exchanging the Menzel from time to time and that it would be shipped to Dresden on November 30. His parting words to me were, "Please find other wonderful paintings like the Menzel for us." The Livies and I will certainly try.

A delightful postscript to this saga was written by Dr Christopher Riopelle as part of a going away presentation to Dr Charles Saumarez Smith when he left the directorship of the National Gallery in July 2007:



Menzel had long figured on the Gallery's informal desiderata list as the most important German painter of the later nineteenth century. His paintings are almost entirely unrepresented in collections outside the German-speaking world. That, as the result of restitution by a major German museum, a Menzel of this ambition and complexity should have come on the market was remarkable. That it should relate to, indeed enter into dialogue with, one of the Gallery's most famous modern paintings, is serendipity. Menzel painted the picture after seeing Edouard Manet's *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* of 1862 (NG3260) when he visited Paris five years later. He acknowledges Manet by quoting the top-hatted figure near the centre of the canvas from that work but then goes on to show how he thinks the painting of modern life should proceed, in a more highly realistic, richly detailed and anecdotal manner. As soon as the picture was offered to us, Charles recognized the necessity of acquiring it and of doing so quickly. He also had to contend, gracefully, with a German director colleague who was understandably dismayed at losing a great painting and startled to see how fast and effectively the Gallery could act when it needed to.

What a contrast between the great Director of the National Gallery and the Generaldirektor in Dresden!

