

Alfred Bader

Alfred Bader Fine Arts - Painting File

A. V. Ostade -
Alchemist

0001-0003

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES	
LOCATOR	5169
BOX	17
FILE	1A



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A Chemist Helping Chemists

March 13, 2003

Ms. Christine Couchman
Benevolent Fund Manager
Royal Society of Chemistry
Science Park, Milton Road
Cambridge CB4 0WF
ENGLAND

Dear Ms. Couchman,

You may recall that during the last three years you have used three of my paintings on your delightful Christmas cards.

Recently I acquired a lovely small panel by a well known Dutch 17th century artist, Adriaen van Ostade. A color snapshot and a black/white photograph are enclosed. I particularly like this painting because the chemist is tearing his hair out. I felt like doing that many times, but in my later years had no hair left.

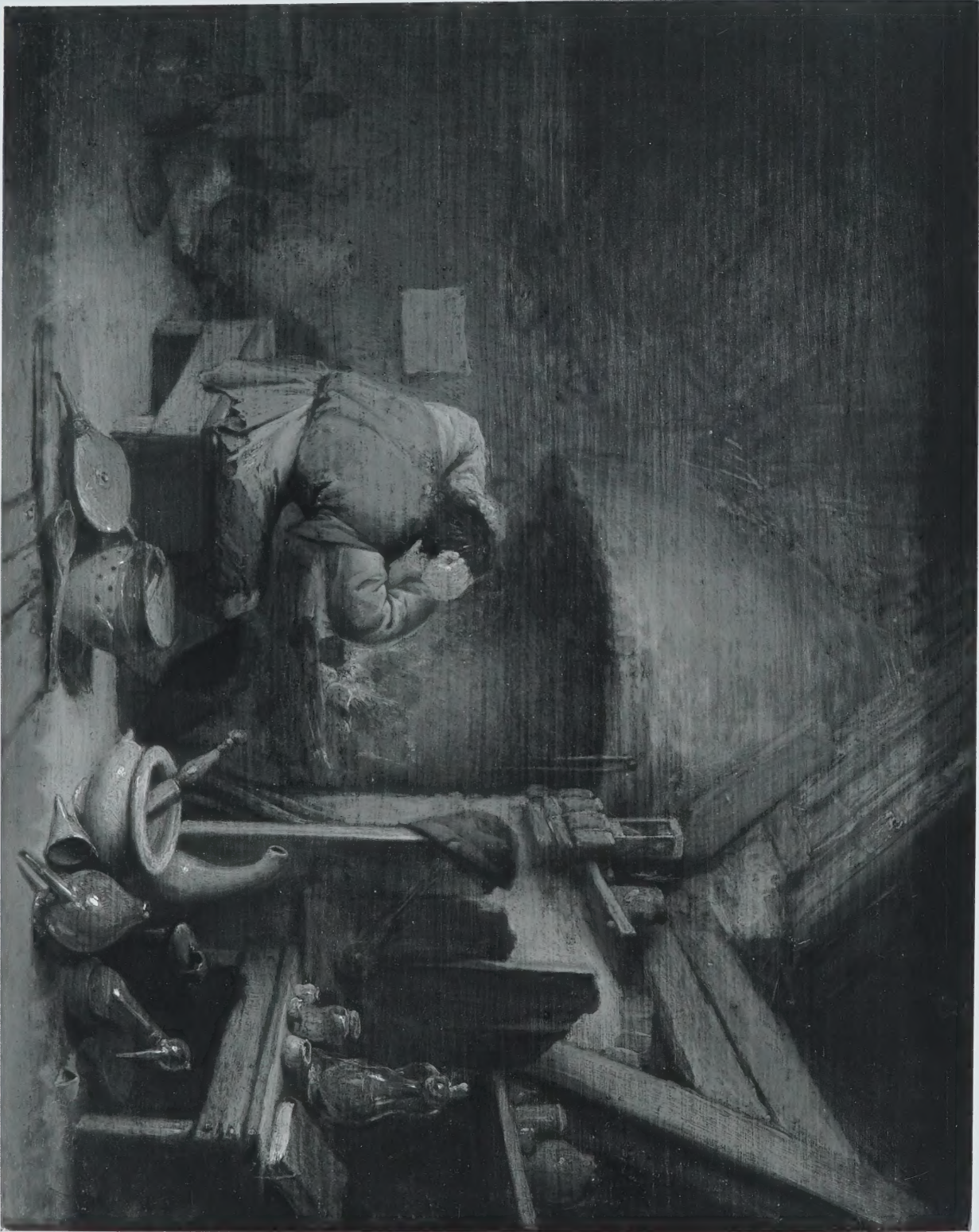
If you might be interested I could send you an 8"x10" color transparency or even bring the painting for your examination to the Royal Society of Chemistry in London.

With all good wishes I remain

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bader
AB/az
Enc.





PAIRED
VMEISA[®]

AVERY®
PV119ED



oil panel 19.3 x 24.4 cms.

Porcelain Adam, k₁ 01 lot 8
07-03

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D
OSTADE
Before Treatment

D
OSTADE
Before Treatment, det.

D
OSTADE
Before treatment
Panel back

D
OSTADE
Clean state

D
OSTADE
Clean state,
detail

D
OSTADE
Finished state



Y3820



8

8 Attributed to Adriaen Jansz. van Ostade
Haarlem 1610 - 1685
 AN ALCHEMIST NEAR A FIREPLACE IN
 HIS STUDIO
 traces of a signature lower right: *P.*
 oil on panel, in a carved and gilt
 wood frame
 19.3 by 24.4 cm.

Nlg. 15.000-20.000
 €6.810-9.080

Bears an old French label on the reverse with an attribution to Adriaen van Ostade (no. 25). Other depictions of the same subject by the artist are of a much later date, such as the *Alchemist* of 1661 in the National Gallery, London (inv. no. 846).

Fred G. Meijer has kindly confirmed the attribution on the basis of first hand inspection. He dates it to the 1640s.

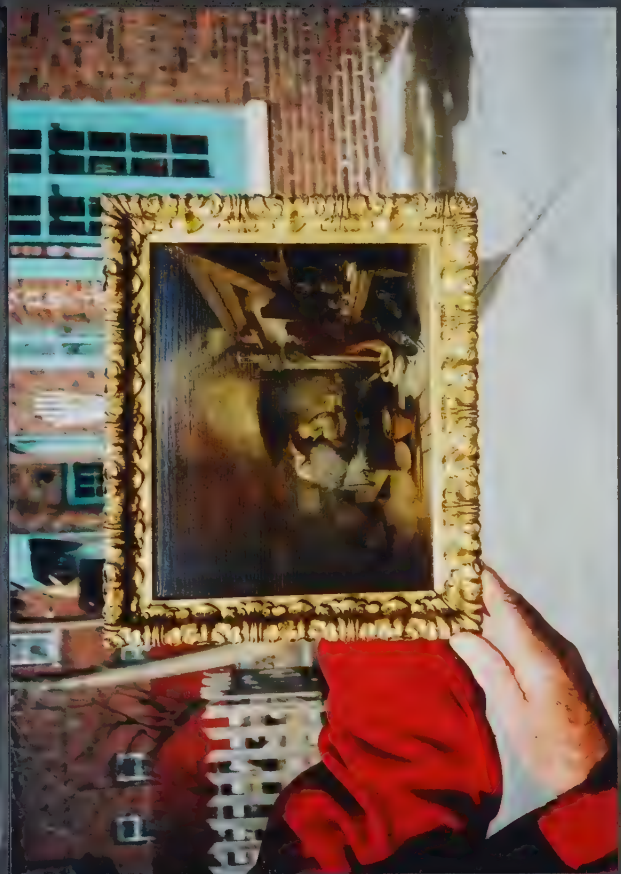
Provenance:

Counts A. & V. Bloudoff, St. Petersburg, their sale, Amsterdam, Fred. Muller, 25 November 1924, lot 129, Nlg. 1.250 to Spanjaard (as Van Ostade).

60.000 -
 90

Most valuable







PROVIDENT
Savings Bank
of
CINCINNATI, OHIO



8

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60 500 -
AD

Most valuable

Adriaen van Ostade (Haarlem 1610 - 1685)

An Alchemist in his Workshop

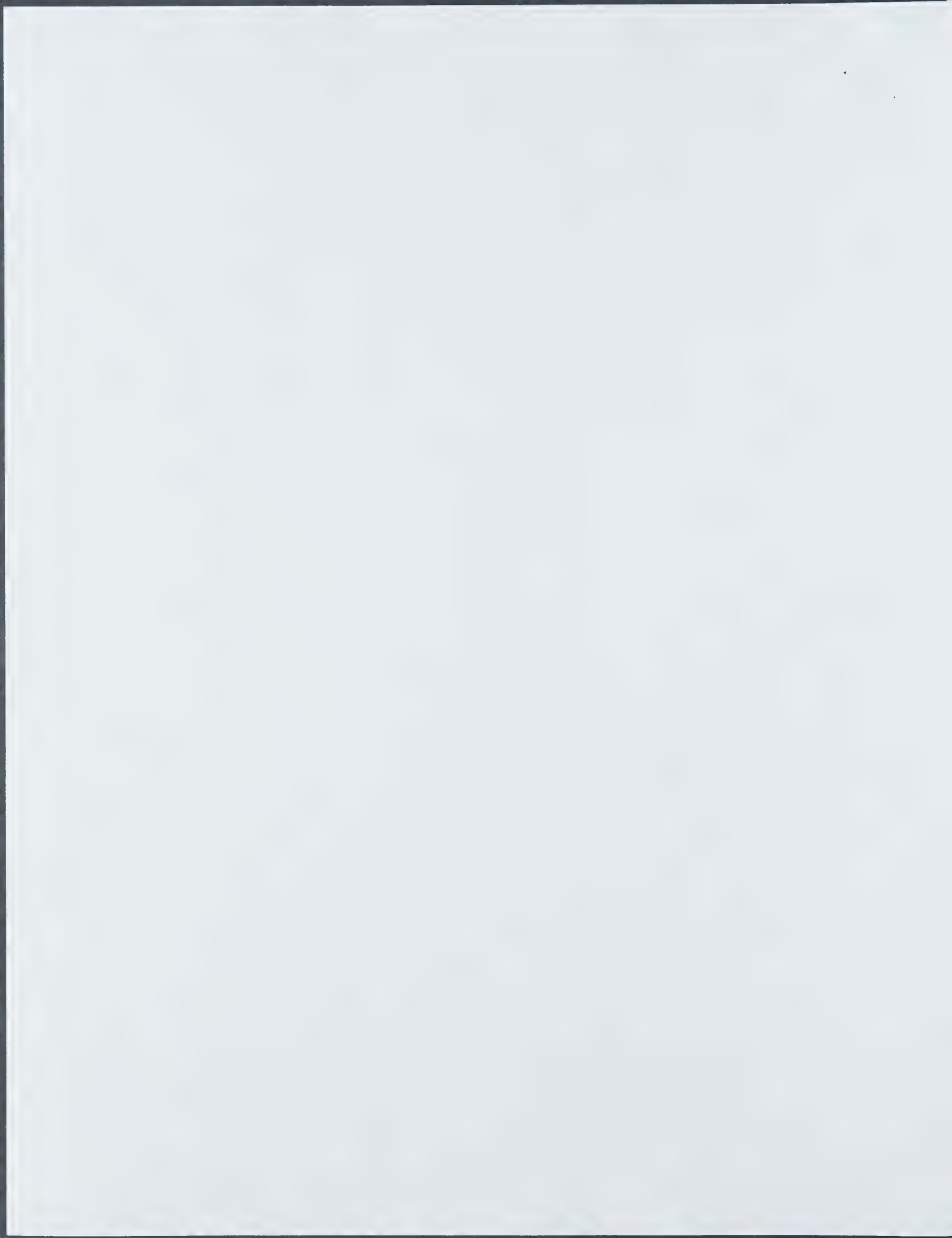
Oil on panel, 19.3 x 24.4 cm

Traces of a signature lower right

Provenance:

Counts A. and V. Bloudoff sale, Amsterdam (Frederik Muller), 25 November 1924 (Lugt 87595), lot 129 (with illustration); sale, Amsterdam (Sotheby's), 6 November 2001, lot 8 (with colour illustration); purchased by Alfred Bader; Milwaukee, collection of Alfred and Isabel Bader

A man sits on a bench at an oven, where flames burst out of a vessel. He reacts in exasperation, pulling at his hair with both hands. From the many vessels related to distillation around him, it is clear that he is an alchemist. Other apparatus related to this profession include the large mortar and pestle to the right of him, and the bellows beside the bench on which he sits. Above, on a shelf beside the chimney, rests an hourglass, which may have found some use in conducting chemical experiments, but in this context is aimed more at the message of vanitas, the well-established tradition of reminding the viewer of the fleeting and insignificant quality of human existence and pursuits in the face of the hereafter.¹ Placed in an alchemical scene, this reminder of the passing of time underscores the traditional criticism of the pursuit of Alchemy as foolish and wasteful,



and deeply misguided. Pieter Bruegel the Elder's famous print of an Alchemist who brings his family to starvation and the poorhouse had a great impact on other artists, and established the critical depiction for the genre.² While some artists relished in the abundant detail and excess of this model, Ostade created a sparse representation, and incorporated only a subtle, isolated critical reference, in the hourglass.

Not signed or dated, this panel can nonetheless be related closely to Ostade's work of the first half of the 1640s. His early works feature simpler compositions and confined spaces, following the mode of Adriaen Brouwer, who was likely his teacher. He then adopted stronger light effects and a thicker, impasto application of paint, but by 1640 he had moved toward more muted arrangements, in combination with a monochromatic palette, as seen in his *Peasant Holding a Pipe*, in the Museum in Hamburg, both of 1640,³ to which the present work closely compares. From the same period dates his depiction of a *Quill Cutter*, now in the Museum in Budapest,⁴ showing a similarly spare rendering of space, soft rendering of form, and free brush work to evoke texture. It appears again in one of his multi-figured compositions of the 1630s, his *Peasant Interior* of 1636 in the Louvre,⁵ which also features a similar figure seen from the back (**fig. ?**), in a hunched-over pose. As with the present picture, the restive energy of his low-life figures are contained by the atmosphere conjured by space and colour. In the ensuing decades of his long career, Ostade developed a more elaborate, detailed and colourful mode, which is represented in his other known depiction of an *Alchemist*, of 1661, now in the National Gallery in London.⁶

The body of the letter is very faint and illegible. It appears to be a standard letter format with a salutation, a main body of text, and a closing. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

The second section of the document contains several paragraphs of text, also rendered as faint, illegible characters. The layout suggests a multi-paragraph letter or a report. The text is too light to read.

Best regards,

4. Adriaen van Ostade, *Quill Cutter*, oil on panel, 33.2 x 26.7 cm, around 1640, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 286; see: collection catalogue Budapest 2000, p. 130 (with illustration).
5. Adriaen van Ostade, *Peasant Interior*, oil on panel, 21.2 x 29.1 cm, signed and dated 1636, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MI 947; collection catalogue Paris 1922, p. 108, no. 2506.
6. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Alchemist*, oil on panel, 34 x 45.2 cm, signed and dated 1661, London, National Gallery, inv. no. 846; see: collection catalogue London 1991, vol. 1, pp. 298 - 299; vol. 2 (with illustration plate 247).
7. He was baptized on 10 December 1610; see: Van der Willigen 1870, pp. 234 - 237.
8. Houbraken, vol. 1, p. 347.
9. See: Miedema 1980, vol. 2, pp. 420, 613, 665, 667, 672.
10. Van der Willigen 1870, pp. 237, 238.
11. *Ibidem*, pp. 238.
12. *Ibidem*.
13. The artist could afford costly burials for his deceased wives, and purchased various debts and sureties; see: Schnackenburg 1981, pp. 14 - 16.

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