

# GERARD HOET

(Zaltbommel 1648 - The Hague 1733)

## *Paris Presenting Helen to the Court of King Priam*

signed with initials 'I.B.G.' (lower right)  
oil on panel  
53 x 66 cm (20<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 26 in)

**I**N *PARIS PRESENTING HELEN TO THE COURT OF KING Priam*, Gerard Hoet presents us with a distilled moment in the build-up to the Trojan War. Paris has returned home to Troy, having stolen Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, from her husband Menelaus, King of Sparta. Paris has entered the court of his father Priam, King of Troy, in order to present Helen to him. Paris and Helen stand, brightly lit, in the centre of the composition. With his right hand, Paris gently pushes Helen toward Priam, whilst with his left he gestures back towards the entrance of the court, where a slave brings in a chest, presumably filled with Menelaus' riches, which Paris also stole. Priam has rushed from his palace in his eagerness to greet his son, opening his arms to embrace him. Behind the king, rush his wife Hecuba and the rest of his court. Figures jostle in the crowd, crane their necks and lean out of windows in their eagerness to see the couple. Paris' gesture, along with that of the kneeling woman before him, also lead the eye towards the background, where Paris' boats are visible on the shore, reminding the viewer of the imminent arrival of the invasion that will gather on that same coast as a result of the prince's actions.

In deciding to depict the large, busy court, Hoet has given himself the opportunity to portray a wide variety of figures, and their differing responses to Paris' return. Men, women and children of varying ages are scattered about the scene. Amongst the rush of courtiers, emotions range from the contented faces of some individuals to those that are more restrained and concerned; the most extreme figure has flung himself to the floor behind Priam, covering his head with his arms, his muscular body taut with emotion. The painting, however, concentrates on the central interaction between the two main couples. Paris and Helen look nervous, waiting to see the king's reaction, whilst Priam and Hecuba have expressions of happiness and curiosity. The two couples also provide a contrast between the young and the old - contrasts being a recurring theme throughout Hoet's work, with this particular distinction being repeated in Hoet's *Vertumnus and Pomona*, which hangs in the Hermitage.<sup>1</sup>

Hoet's *Mercury and Herse*, see fig.1, also has several similarities with *Paris Presenting Helen to the Court of King Priam*. Compositionally, in both

<sup>1</sup> See catalogue no. 67, fig. 1.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of this decorative painting, see Hoet's ceiling and wall paintings at the castle of De Slangenburg at Doetinchem.



Gerard Hoet, *Mercury and Herse*, c.1710,  
Norton Simon Museum, California (Figure 1)

paintings the main body of figures arrives onto the scene in a fluid stream that traces back around the corner, disappearing into the distance, creating a sense of a crowd much larger than that which is visible. In *Mercury and Herse*, again Hoet delights in painting figures in unusual poses, such as the men straining under heavy baskets, the man perched on the fountain, or Mercury, who hovers above the scene. It is a painting indicative of Hoet's delicate and decorative style of painting.

Hoet trained with his father and with Warnard van Ryssen, a pupil of Cornelis van Poelenburch (see inventory). Having lived in The Hague, Paris, Brussels and the northern Netherlands, he settled in Utrecht, where he became a member of the Guild of St. Luke. Whilst living in Utrecht he also founded a drawing academy in 1697 with Hendrick Schoock. From 1714 Hoet resided in The Hague. His *oeuvre* consisted of mainly religious, mythological or classical subjects set in landscapes, which were painted on a small scale in the style of van Poelenburch, but he also produced larger works, often with many figures, in an elegant, classicising style. He was also heavily influenced by French landscape painting.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Hoet painted portraits and some genre pieces. His book on drawing, with one hundred and three prints by Pieter Bodart, was published in 1712. He also designed many illustrations for bibles.

