

ATTRIBUTED TO
CORNELIS PIETERSZ. BEGA

(Haarlem 1631/2 - Haarlem 1664)

A Standing Soldier, seen from Behind

red chalk, within black chalk framing lines
 26.7 x 14.4 cm (12 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{7}{8}$ in)

IN *A STANDING SOLDIER, SEEN FROM BEHIND*, THE SUBJECT is depicted standing at ease. The soldier's left hand is raised to his hip and he leans his weight on the object he holds in his right, possibly an arquebus, a forerunner to the musket. His sword is also prominently displayed, so that the viewer is left in no doubt over the man's identity. The figure is turned slightly to the left so a glimpse of his face, replete with enormous moustache, is visible.

A drawing showing exactly the same figure from a fractionally different viewpoint was sold in the 1960s as by Cornelis Pietersz. Bega.¹ It seems that these two drawings must have been made by two different artists, who happened to have been working alongside one another in the same studio. The survival of such a pair of drawings, clearly made at the same time from the same posed model, is rare, especially amongst seventeenth-century Dutch drawings. There are a few examples from Rembrandt's studio, and many others have survived from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when numerous semi-amateur life-drawing societies sprang up throughout Holland. However, this may be the only known extant example from the close-knit artistic community of Haarlem.

Of the two drawings, the present work looks more like the work of Bega, although it is often difficult to distinguish his drawings from those of some of his Haarlem contemporaries, notably Gerrit and Job Berckheyde (1638-1698 and 1630-1693), and Leendert van der Cooghen (1632-1681). Attribution is made particularly difficult because the Haarlem school shared models and traded drawings. Moreover, in Bega's case, none of his studies which were drawn *naer het leven* (from life), seem to relate to a painting or etching. Despite the stylistic similarities, as Peter Schatborn has observed, 'From the whole group of Haarlem artists Bega is the one who has gone the furthest in developing this characteristic manner into a firm style'.²

When compared to other examples of Bega's single-figure studies, for which he is particularly noted, *A Standing Soldier, seen from Behind* has some similarities in its execution with his work (fig. 1). Bega's drawings are executed mainly in red chalk on white paper, such as the illustrated works, or in black and white chalk on blue paper. Both *A Standing Soldier, seen from Behind* and *Milkmaid Seated* are of anonymous figures, whose identities are indicated simply and concisely. Both works have regular and precise parallel shading and

well defined forms, which are characteristic of Bega's drawings, and indeed the Haarlem school in general. Both drawings also suggest the folds of drapery in a subtle, yet precise way.

Figures in the type of military uniform seen in *Standing Soldier, seen from Behind* are rather rare in the work of the artists thus far mentioned, although they do appear more frequently in the compositions of Italianate artists such as Jan Both (c.1618-1652) and Karel Dujardin (1626-before1678) (see inventory for both artists). The handling of the present drawing, however, would suggest it is a product of the Haarlem school.

Bega was born into prosperous circumstances; his mother, Maria Cornelis, inherited half the estate and all of the red chalk drawings of her father, Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem (1562-1638), who was a renowned Mannerist artist. Having studied with Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685), Bega joined the Guild of St. Luke in Haarlem in 1654.

Bega painted, drew, etched and made counterproofs in a wide variety of media on different types of small-scale supports and he may have been the first Dutch artist to make monotypes, (but this remains controversial.) Bega's principal subjects were genre representations of taverns, domestic interiors and villages. He often depicted nursing mothers, prostitutes, drunks, smokers, gamblers and fools such as quack doctors and alchemists. Although *A Standing Soldier, seen from Behind* depicts a respectable figure, as is *Milkmaid Seated*, both figures correlate with the recurrent subject matter of lower class Dutch life that the artist employed. It seems that Bega remained and worked in Haarlem until the end of his short life when he was probably killed by the plague.



Cornelis Pietersz Bega,
Milkmaid Seated,
 The Courtauld Gallery,
 London,
 (Figure 1)

¹ London, Sotheby's, 10 December 1968, lot 155, from the collection of Dr. N. Meyer (L.1812)

² P. Schatborn, *Dutch Figure Drawings from the Seventeenth Century*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, and Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1981-82, p. 105



(Actual Size)