

CURRIER MUSEUM *of* ART

The Currier Museum acquires one of the earliest paintings of free Blacks made in the West

The museum celebrates Black History Month with an important new acquisition

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The Currier Museum of Art recently acquired one of the earliest depictions of free Black people in Europe. Painted in Antwerp around 1650, *Black Men and Women in a Tavern* shows figures drinking and smoking in a relaxed setting. Produced in the circle of the Flemish artist David Teniers the Younger, the work closely resembles paintings of the period showing White people carousing in taverns.

Blacks from Africa appear in European art beginning in the 16th century, but they were normally presented as exotic figures in the roles of servants, slaves, or Biblical figures. They almost always wear elaborate foreign attire. In this painting, Blacks are the main focus of the scene and wear ordinary clothes of the time.

There were Black communities in the port cities of the Netherlands, including Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. Artists like Rubens and Rembrandt sketched Black individuals in Antwerp and Amsterdam respectively. This genre scene does not appear to record specific individuals, but evokes the daily life of Black people in Antwerp, comparable to scenes of White people in urban taverns.

A generous gift expands the diversity of the Currier Museum's collection

The painting is a generous gift from Salomon Lilian of Amsterdam. "When I visited the Currier Museum in 2022, I was so impressed by the diversity of its collection which included paintings of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. I decided that this unique painting showing Blacks as free people in the 17th century belongs in this museum."

"We are so grateful to Salomon Lilian for the gift of such a compelling image," says Alan Chong, director of the Currier Museum. "We have tried to add works of artistic importance with social significance that will get our audience thinking. This gift is a perfect launch to Black History Month."

Black Men and Women in a Tavern joins several recent acquisitions by Black artists, including major works by Robert Duncanson, the most important Black painter of 19th-century America; Norman Lewis, a leading member of the New York School; and Faith Ringgold, a much-beloved contemporary artist.

A painting made in Antwerp around 1650

The painting is closely related to the tavern scenes painted by David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690) and his workshop, which often show people smoking and drinking, and sometimes misbehaving. These depict White individuals exclusively, except for the Currier Museum's new painting. David's younger brother, Abraham Teniers occasionally depicted Black men as servants or slaves, usually in ceremonial dress.

A later copy of the Currier Museum's painting is now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; it was acquired in 2019 as a work by the Dutch artist Adriaen van Ostade as from the 1630s (*Annual Report Fiscal Year 2020*, p. 9: inv. 37.2941). However, this work is derived from the Currier Museum's painting, which was made in Antwerp, not Amsterdam.



Circle of David Teniers the Younger
Black Men and Women in a Tavern, mid-17th century
oil on wood
Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire.
Gift of Salomon Lilian

About the Currier Museum of Art

The [Currier Museum of Art](#) is an internationally renowned art museum located in Manchester, New Hampshire. The museum features paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, and photographs, including works by Monet, Picasso, O'Keeffe, Hopper, and Wyeth. It presents exhibitions, tours, art classes, and community programs year-round. The museum hosts a growing artist-in-residence program. Two houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright are part of its permanent collection.

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