



**PROANTIC**  
LE PLUS BEAU CATALOGUE D'ANTIQUITES

## Oil Painting-jan Steen-the Extraction Of The Folly Stone-circa 1660



2 500 EUR

Signature : JAN STEEN

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 25 cm

Height : 35 cm

### Description

THE EXTRACTION OF THE STONE OF MADNESS "THE OPERATOR" Oil painting on canvas, re-canvased in the first half of the 19th century In its period frame 35 x 25.5 cm Good state of conservation Label on the back, with for the title "The Operator" and an old attribution to JAN STEEN 1626-1679 Provenance: Foucard de Valenciennes sale in 1898, 1950 gold francs A popular belief originating from the Middle Ages, but which lasted until the 17th century, was that the madness was contained in a stone lodged in the brain, so that it would have been enough to extract it by trepanation to cure the mentally ill. This belief made the fortune of barbers who called themselves surgeons and other charlatans who ran through the villages to cut into the skulls of a few unfortunate people, brandishing at the

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end of the operation a stone that they had hidden in their sleeve. As early as the 10th century, the Persian scholar Rhazes denounced this superstition and the impostures it entailed. At the end of the 15th century, a famous painting by Hieronymus Bosch, *Lithotomy*, ridiculed the practice (ill. 1; the painting is kept at the Prado Museum, but its autograph nature is today contested). The surgeon wears a funnel, which turns the presumption of insanity against him. Instead of extracting a stone, he takes a flower out of the patient's head, which is explained by the homonymy in Dutch between the stone (*kei*) and the flower or carnation: "Een kei in het hoofd hebben », "to have a flower in the head", means to be crazy or demented. Following Bosch, the subject was treated in a satirical manner by Jan Sanders van Hemessen, Pierre Brueghel the Younger, Marteen van Cleve, Pieter Baltens, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, etc. Our painting does not resemble any of the images known to date on the subject. Instead of depicting a crowd of characters, he reduces the composition to a pyramid of three figures: at the bottom, a sidekick from behind, who can only be distinguished by his large black hat, and who undoubtedly forces the patient to stay still ; in the middle the sick man, whose twisted mouth and bulging eyes scream panic; at the top, the operator, who looks at the spectator with his perverse and mischievous eyes, taking him as an accomplice in his deceit. Jan Steen is a Dutch painter of the Golden Age, representative of the Baroque. He painted many subjects of everyday life, such as the tooth puller in 1651, or even at the same period, the operation on the foot. The tight composition of our painting, the brown tone of a canvas largely painted in juice, the physiognomy of the characters also remind us of the Flemish Joos van Craesbeeck (1615-1661). For example, his grimacing drinker seated at an inn painted around 1650.