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EST. 1817

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**Jan Cossiers** (Antwerp 1600-1671)

*The penitent Magdalene*

Signed (lower right): '...Cossiers f.'

Oil on panel

25 1/4 x 49 7/8 in. (64.2 x 49.9 cm.)

Marked on the reverse with the mark of the Antwerp panel makers guild and the maker's mark of Guiliam Gabron (1586-1674).

Painted in the 1630s



## Provenance

Private collection, Antwerp, until 2022.

After serving an apprenticeship with his father, Anton Cossiers (fl 1604–c. 1646), and then with Cornelis de Vos, he went first to Aix-en-Provence, where he stayed with the painter Abraham de Vries (1590–1650/62), and then to Rome, where he is mentioned in October 1624. By 1626 he had returned to Aix and had contact with, among others, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, the famous humanist, who recommended him to Rubens. By November 1627 Cossiers had settled back in Antwerp. The following year he became a master in the Guild of St Luke, and in 1630 he married for the first time; he married a second time in 1640.

Cossiers's earliest works, which are difficult to date more precisely than the 1630s, consist of genre scenes, mostly life-size representations of fortune-tellers, gypsies, smokers and the like (e.g. *The Fortune-teller*, Valenciennes, Mus. B.-A.). In the choice of subject-matter and the unusual use of *chiaroscuro*, these works are related to similar paintings by the Utrecht, Antwerp and Roman Caravaggisti, but Cossiers had a freer style.

Although Peiresc wrote to Cossiers's teacher de Vries in 1629, saying that Rubens had considered taking Cossiers along to Spain as a journeyman, apparently this never happened. Rubens did, however, involve

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Cossiers in the execution of the various large series of paintings he was commissioned to make in the 1630s. Thus in 1635 Cossiers contributed to the decorations for the Triumphal Entry into Antwerp of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, and between 1636 and 1638 he painted a number of the mythological scenes designed by Rubens for Philip IV's hunting-lodge, the Torre de la Parada near Madrid. For this cycle Cossiers painted the following compositions after designs by Rubens: *Jupiter and Lycaon* and *Narcissus* (both Madrid, Prado), as well as *Deucalion and Pyrrha*, *Polyphemus* and the *Death of Hyacinthus* (all untraced).

After Rubens's death in 1640, Cossiers executed numerous history pieces with religious themes for churches in the southern Netherlands as well as for the open market in Antwerp. Among his most important commissions outside Antwerp were the *Adoration of the Shepherds* for the former 'secret' church of the Amsterdam Jesuits, De Krýlberg (The Chalk Hill) (1657; now Minneapolis, MN, Inst. A.), and the enormous *Passion* series (1655–6) for the choir of the Béguinage church in Mechelen. In his later work, especially after c. 1650, religious themes predominate, mainly those related to the Counter-Reformation. Through such commissions, Cossiers became one of Antwerp's most prominent artists during the second half of the 17th century. Stylistically, the later works are characterized by an even freer application of paint and the use of rather subdued colour, qualities apparently quite unusual among contemporary Antwerp painters. Cossiers's compositions are striking, moreover, for the emphatic rendering of pathos, both in the figures' exaggerated emotional expressions and their lively gestures. Little is known about Cossiers's workshop practice. He must nevertheless have been a fluent and accomplished draughtsman, as can be seen, for instance, in the drawn portraits of his children, striking and sensitive characterizations that reveal sharp psychological insight (e.g. *The Artist's Son*, *Guillellemus*, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library).

Although Cossiers often worked in the manner of Rubens' large-scale compositions, he was most successful as a genre and portrait painter. In the present painting, Cossiers applies techniques of portraiture painting as if the young female saint was an existing woman posing for him. Her loose blond hair lies over her bare shoulder. She is wearing a rough fabric suitable for her time of repentance as a desert hermit after leaving her life as a follower of Jesus. Her hand rests on a superbly executed skull. A painting of the same subject by Cossiers featuring a similar skull is at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (fig. 1; inv. 37.372).

On the back of the panel, the panel maker's mark of Guillaume Gabron and the hallmarks of the Antwerp panel makers guild (castle and Antwerp hands) can be identified. Gabron was Cossier's brother-in-law as

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he married his sister Magdalena Cossiers (1). A slightly inferior version of this painting without panel marks was sold in Paris at Artcurial, 21 March 2018, lot 106 (fig. 2). Considering the panel marks on the reverse, it can be assumed that the present painting most likely served as the prototype for the later version sold in Paris.

(1) <http://jordaensvandyck.org/archive/gabron-family/>.



Fig. 1: Jan Cossiers, *The penitent Saint Mary Magdalene with a skull in her hands*, c.1650, oil on panel, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (Maryland)

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Fig. 2: Jan Cossiers, *The penitent Saint Mary Magdalene with a skull in her hands*, oil on panel, 64.5 x 48.5 cm, Paris, Artcurial, 21 March 2018, lot 106