

Jacob van Oost the Elder (1601-1671)

DIANA THE HUNTRESS, c.1628-71

Oil on canvas 172.7 x 222.6 cm

Transferred from Chester Town Hall 1996.1

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Diana was the classical goddess of the moon, and wears a crescent over her brow. She was also the goddess of hunting, and is shown with a falcon and javelin. Her hounds run down the steps to join the hunt, which rushes across the avenue in the park. This is a reference to the story of Actaeon, a young prince who accidentally stumbled across Diana as she bathed. Outraged, the goddess turned him into a stag, which was pursued and torn to pieces by his own hounds.

Jacob van Oost the Elder was a Flemish Baroque portrait and history painter. Born in Bruges in 1601, he visited Italy, but returned to Bruges and became Dean of the Painters' Guild in 1633. He was greatly influenced by Rubens – the supreme master of the Flemish Baroque – and by the Northern followers of Caravaggio. The backgrounds of his pictures are generally embellished with architecture, and he painted numerous altarpieces for Flemish churches, particularly in Bruges, where he died in 1671.