



DUTCH SCHOOL, 1775–1810

Diaphanorama with the feast of Purim at the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam

perspective box made of brown lacquered oak, three glass panes painted in oil

330 (w) x 445 (h) x 130 (d) mm [at largest points]

Provenance:

Private collection, Dorset

Produced exclusively in the Netherlands during the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, diaphanoramas (or diaphanoramas) constituted a popular form of domestic visual entertainment. A significant, but understudied element in the pre-history of cinema, diaphanoramas succeeded the seventeenth-century perspective boxes of Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), and the mid-eighteenth-century miniature card dioramas of Martin Engelbrecht (1684–1756), and prefigured Louis Daguerre's (1787–1851) life-size dioramas. Their fragility, however, has resulted in a very limited survival rate – only around 120 examples are known today. Formed of three sheets of cold painted glass encased within an oak box, this unique survival depicts the feast of Purim – the annual celebration of the salvation of the Jewish people from the massacre plotted by the Achaemenid official Haman – at the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. Completed in 1675, the synagogue was once the largest in the world and it remains both an active place of worship and a major cultural landmark.

Diaphanoramas were typically modelled after prints and drawings, and this hitherto unpublished example relates to Bernard Picart (1673–1733) and Jean Frederic Bernard's (1683–1744) celebrated *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*. Originally published in Amsterdam in seven volumes between 1723 and 1737, this influential encyclopaedia of religious customs was swiftly republished overseas and translated into multiple languages. Volume I describes the religious customs of Catholics and Jews, and the French edition of 1741 includes an engraving captioned *La fête de Purim*, a collaboration between two of Picart's pupils: Louis Fabricius Dubourg and Bernard Bernaerts. During the 1750s, this engraving was widely copied and reproduced, with examples published in Paris by Jacques Chéreau, Jacques-Gabriel Huquier and the Basset family, and in London by William Forrest. These prints provided the model for the maker of this diaphanorama

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