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The Cover

Of the 20 or so versions of Frans Hals's (1580/85-1666) lost painting, *The Rommel Pot Player*, the version at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Tex (cover), is generally thought to follow the original most closely. Another fine, though considerably smaller, version hangs at The Art Institute in Chicago. It is attributed to Hals's brilliant student, Judith Leyster, and is also most certainly based on the original. The painter of the Kimbell version is as yet not identified but was probably also a Hals student.

In *The Rommel Pot Player*, Hals gives us the group portrait, wherein each of the members must be distinctive and yet none can dominate. In the center foreground is the rommel pot (Dutch, *rommelen*, "to rumble"), a noisemaker used at spring carnival time which emits a sound not unlike the squeal of a pig. In the lower left a young boy holding a coin in his left hand is completely absorbed in the rommel pot. His credulous expression is tinged with just a bit of wonder at how such a small pot can contain a pig. Behind him, two wiser boys, also holding coins, watch the "musician's" face and try to get his attention. The two adults peering from the door behind them could be householders aroused from sleep by the noise. At any rate, they do not share the general merriment. To the right the neighborhood bully reaches an enormous hand around the back of the rommel pot player, perhaps to trick the youngest boy into dropping the coin into his hand. Meanwhile, the cause of all this hilarity, the rommel pot player, gazes directly at us with his toothless smile and bids us share in the sheer delight of the children. And though the foxtail which trails from his hat is the symbol of the fool, something says this man is no fool at all, especially when it comes to the rowdy behind him. But the

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