Newly acquired by The Cleveland Museum of Art is this 17th century Dutch painting by Jan Steen which portrays one of the vividly emotional scenes from the Old Testament's Book of Esther. The painting will be on display beginning Tuesday in the Museum's Recent Accessions Gallery.

Here Steen has captured with brilliant color and dramatic staging of characters, the particular moment when, at a specially arranged banquet, Esther chooses to reveal to her husband King Ahasuerus, that his minister Haman has been treacherously responsible for the decree "to destroy, to slay and to annihilate all Jews (within the king's provinces), young and old, women and children, in one day." After this accusation Haman is in terror before the king and queen and he (seated at the right side of the table) turns his face away from his accuser and wrathful master. Esther is seated at the table on the left and the king is standing at the center with an arm upraised in fury toward Haman.

Steen was very much interested in depicting Biblical stories currently popular at that time and written for professional and amateur theater by contemporary poets. The Museum's new acquisition is one of about eight recorded versions of this particular theme of which Steen was fond. The crowd of people in the painting are suggested as players on a stage with the main characters in the foreground. All costumes are contemporary to Steen's time except for Ahasuerus and Haman who are dressed more to fit in with the time of Esther.

Steen not only portrayed Biblical scenes in his works but also depicted the everyday, 17th century Dutch life he saw around him and was especially noted for inn scenes. He worked the better part of his time in Leyden and Haarlem.

The painting will be on display through August.

M. 6.29.64
The recently acquired picture at the Cleveland Museum of Art by Jan Steen, of the old Testament story of "Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman" is on exhibition in Gallery B, among recent accessions to the collections. It represents the dramatic moment in the story when Esther reveals to Ahasuerus her husband, the perfidy of his trusted minister, Haman, in the latter's persecution of the Jews, and Ahasuerus' wrath.

Steen was associated and interested in the works of dramatic poets of his time, whose portrayal of biblical stories were currently popular. The amateur players called "Rederijkers" as well as the professional theatres used these plays continually, and Steen was fond of this particular scene using the theme in as many as sixty recorded versions of which the present is one of the richest. One is known to be in the collection of the Hermitage and another in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Birmingham.

Jan Steen lived in Holland from 1626 - 1679 working mostly in Leyden and Haarlem and treated the intimate and daily life and times of the people. He is especially noted for inn scenes. Among his works are numerous of these dramatic stories from the theatre. Here he has grouped his numerous players in contemporary costume, except for Ahasueras and Haman, dressed as befitted the story in costumes with embellishments appropriate to the theme, - turbans with feathers, etc.

The painting is rich and in fine condition; the colors brilliant. There is a characteristic and opulent still life on the table, and much fine jewelry decorating the main actors. The whole is set in a stage-like and crowded area above which is drawn
a curtain, suspended across the top suggesting the play.

The picture has been in several Dutch collections notably the Dreesmann in Amsterdam; it has been often exhibited; and it is recorded in all the principal literature on the painter.