

# Johnny Van Haeften LTD

---

13 Duke Street, St. James's London SW1Y 6DB  
Telephone: (020) 7930 3062 Fax: (020) 7839 6303  
Email: paintings@johnnyvanhaeften.com www.johnnyvanhaeften.com

**FRANS FRANCKEN the Younger**  
**(1581 – Antwerp – 1642)**

**in collaboration with**

**AMBROSIUS FRANCKEN the Younger**  
**(c. 1590 – Antwerp – 1632)**

**ABRAHAM GOVAERTS**  
**1589 – Antwerp – 1626)**

**HANS JORDAENS III**  
**(c. 1595 – Antwerp – 1643)**

**ALEXANDER KEIRINCX**  
**(Antwerp 1600 – 1652 Amsterdam)**

---

Arcadia: a Pastoral Landscape with Shepherds and Shepherdesses  
picnicking

On panel, 28<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 41<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins. (72.7 x 104.4 cm)

Provenance:

Private Collection, Munich, Germany

Note:

We are grateful to Dr. Ursula Härting for her assistance in  
cataloguing this painting

A verdant landscape dotted with sheep and cattle is the setting for this pastoral idyll. A party of young lovers is gathered in a clearing between tall, sinuous trees. Some of them carry crooks or staffs that identify them as shepherds and shepherdesses, but these are hardly rough and ready peasants who lead a simple outdoor life caring for their livestock. No, these beautiful young people, with their refined gestures, who sit about languidly, embracing one another, belong to the idyllic world of Arcadia. They all wear brightly-coloured, flowing garments, some go barefoot and others don broad-brimmed straw hats, decked with flowers. One or two of the young men are naked to the waist, while the bodice of the shepherdess seated in the centre foreground has casually slipped off her shoulder, revealing her bare breast. However, she scarcely seems to mind, so enthralled is she with her ardent admirer, who is dressed in the style of a shepherd *all'antica* and wears a neatly-trimmed moustache and beard and a feather tucked into his hat at a jaunty angle. An elegant picnic of pastries and sweetmeats is laid out on the grass nearby, from which the young couples help themselves to the delicacies and sip wine from fine glass vessels. A lyrical mood is evoked by the musician standing on the left, strumming a lute, who casts a sidelong glance towards the viewer, as if enjoining us to enter this mythical world. Further off, in the middle distance, a bagpiper plays his pipes to the inhabitants of the fields and woods. A couple reclines on the grass listening to his melodies, while youthful shepherds dance round, hand in hand with nymph-like figures, clad in diaphanous robes.

This fascinating painting is the product of collaboration between several Antwerp painters who were specialists in different fields. Dr. Ursula Härting, the author of monographs on Frans Francken the Younger and Abraham Govaerts, has identified the contribution of no less than five individual hands<sup>1</sup>. The landscape is the work of the woodland specialist Abraham Govaerts, while the figures are by Ambrosius Francken the Younger, with contributions by his older brother Frans Francken the Younger, who is also responsible for the still-life elements of foodstuffs and fine glass and metal vessels. The cows, goats and sheep are the work of Hans Jordaens III, a figure and animal specialist. It also seems that at a late stage in the picture's evolution, the landscapist Alexander Keirincx added the finishing touches to the landscape, as his characteristically soft, feathery brushstrokes can be discerned in the uppermost layers of paint in parts of the background surrounding the figures.

Cooperation of this kind by two or more masters was not unusual in seventeenth-century Antwerp, indeed, it was a typical feature of the production of cabinet paintings of the period. The tradition of painters becoming specialists in particular genres and contributing a share to a single work was already fairly well established by the end of the sixteenth century and the practice was fostered by the close-knit nature of the city's artistic community. It was not uncommon for the families of leading painters to be connected by marriage, while both personal and professional ties were reinforced by common membership of the Guild of Saint Luke. Moreover, collaboration offered a practical approach to the production of high quality works for the market.

Of the collaborators involved here, Frans Francken II was the eldest and most established member of the team: he was also a seasoned collaborator. Born in 1581, he belonged to a large family of painters. His father, of the same name, was a painter, as were his uncles Ambrosius I and Hieronymus I and his three brothers, Thomas, Ambrosius II and Hieronymus II. Frans II trained with his father and became a master in the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke in 1605. The most productive member of the dynasty, Frans II was primarily a painter of cabinet-sized history paintings. His skill as a painter of graceful little Mannerist figures was much sought after and he was frequently called upon to contribute staffage to the landscapes of his fellow

painters. Very little is known about his younger brother Ambrosius II, who was probably born about 1590, trained as a painter and joined the family studio. To a large extent his artistic personality has been overshadowed by that of his more famous brother, in addition to which, the repetition of Christian names in successive generations of his family, has made it difficult to disentangle the various family members and establish the facts about his life. Although stylistically closely related to Frans II, Ambrosius II's choice of subject matter sets him apart somewhat from his brother. As Härting has observed, unlike Frans, he seems to have had a penchant for "happy genre scenes"<sup>ii</sup>. Ambrosius II, like his older brother, also provided the staffage in the landscapes of other painters, including Abraham Govaerts, Alexander Keirincx, Tobias Verhaecht and Joos de Momper. Furthermore, it was not unusual for him to work on joint ventures with his brother Frans II. Hans Jordaens III was another figure painter working in the immediate circle of Frans Francken II, who painted staffage in the landscapes of his fellow painters. He was born around 1596 and enrolled in the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke in 1620. He is especially known for his skill in painting animals, the style of which is easily recognisable.

Now, to turn to the landscape specialists: Abraham Govaerts was born in 1589 and became a master in the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke in 1607-08. The name of his teacher is not known, but he was clearly influenced in his early work by the forest landscapes of Jan Brueghel the Elder and Gillis van Coninxloo. In 1622, he married Isabella Gillis with whom he had two daughters. He enjoyed a successful career, but died suddenly on 9 September 1626, aged only thirty-seven, having fallen victim to a contagious disease that claimed the life of his wife four days later and left his two baby daughters orphaned. Like many other landscape painters of his day, Govaerts turned regularly to figure specialists to populate his forest scenes, of whom Frans Francken II seems to have been his most frequent partner<sup>iii</sup>, but he also undertook joint ventures with Ambrosius Francken II<sup>iv</sup>, especially towards the end of his career.

Alexander Keirincx, the youngest of our five painters, was born in Antwerp in 1600: a pupil and the most important disciple of Abraham Govaerts, he became a master in the Antwerp Guild in 1618-19. Like Govaerts, he specialised in decorative forest landscapes, the earliest of which owe much to the work of his master. Keirincx left Antwerp sometime around 1627 and moved to the Northern Netherlands, where he established himself as a successful landscape painter in Amsterdam. Apart from a trip to London in 1639-1640, he remained in the Dutch metropolis until his death in 1652. He, too, often collaborated with figure painters and, during his Antwerp period, worked with many of the same partners as his master.

From this brief resumé of our five painters' lives, one gets a picture of a group of painters who enjoyed a close working relationship and frequently worked with each other on a variety of projects. Nevertheless, we still know very little about how such joint ventures were conceived or co-ordinated. It is assumed that pictures were moved back and forth between the painters' studios, which were often situated close to one another. The exhibition, *Rubens & Brueghel: A Working Friendship*, held in 2006 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and The Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague and its accompanying catalogue, which gives a detailed analysis of a group of paintings by these two great masters, has done much to further our understanding of collaborative practices. What does become clear from this, is that there were no fixed rules: each project was different and therefore a varied and flexible approach to the working process was required. Nevertheless, compositions in which figures assumed a prominent role obviously required a greater degree of cooperation from the outset than those in which figures featured as a relatively minor motif.

A careful physical examination of the present painting, with the assistance of infrared reflectography, tells us much about the working process employed here. The composition was laid in by means of an underdrawing, much of which is visible to the naked eye. The general lie of the land is indicated, as are the positions of the principal trees and figures. The composition of the landscape is certainly typical of Govaerts in his final years, with stands of trees framing the scene, a large tree trunk serving as a repoussoir motif in the foreground and a clump of trees rising in the centre, with vistas into the far distance on either side. The overlapping layers of paint indicate that Govaerts painted much of the landscape before the Francken brothers and Jordaens went on to paint the figures and animals: there are, for instance, places where the contours of the figures clearly overlap the green of the landscape. However, in other places, the reverse is true and a layer of green overlaps the outlines of the figures, indicating that Keirincx must have added the final layer of paint in some areas of the background, thereby bringing together the various different elements into the composition.

In Härting's opinion, the present painting was probably executed between 1626 and 1632, that is to say, between the last year of Abraham Govaerts's life and the year in which Ambrosius II passed away. We know that at the time of Govaerts's death there were unfinished paintings in his studio and that eleven painters were commissioned to complete them. Hans Jordaens and the Francken brothers, Frans II and Ambrosius II<sup>v</sup>, were all members of this group and Härting has speculated that the present painting may indeed be one of the those completed after Govaerts's death. Since the painting bears the hallmarks of Govaerts's style, it must have been begun before his death in September 1626, but Härting feels that the accomplished treatment of the figures and animals cannot date from much before that time. She also argues that the pastoral subject, which seems to be unique in the art of Antwerp at this time, could not have been conceived at an earlier date. By this date, the pastoral mode was already finding an appreciative audience in the Northern Netherlands, especially in Utrecht, but it does not seem to have become current in the Southern Netherlands until the early 1630s, with the pastoral landscapes of Rubens and other painters in his circle. As a final note on the dating of this painting, the present author has observed that since Alexander Keirincx had a hand in the completion of this painting, his departure from Antwerp around 1627 would seem to provide a *terminus ante quem*.

The ideal of the carefree shepherd has its roots in classical literature, especially the poetry of Virgil, author of the *Eclogues* (or *Bucolics*, literally "Shepherds' Songs") and the *Georgics*, celebrating the simple life of the farmer. These poems reached a wide audience in the Netherlands following the publication of translations of both books by Karel van Mander in 1597. Contemporary poets, playwrights and songwriters, inspired by classical descriptions of an idyllic and peaceful world, wrote evocative tales of shepherds and shepherdesses, which in their turn, gave rise to a wide variety of pastoral images. Whilst our painting does not appear to be derived from a specific literary source, its general conception, together with the relaxed groupings of figures, dressed in colourful robes and flower-bedecked hats, perfectly evokes the Arcadian idyll. In a war-torn age and particularly after the expiration of the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621 and the resumption of hostilities with the Northern Provinces, there was a yearning for a return to peace. This desire often finds expression in the art of the period in the form of allegory and it is possible that to the seventeenth-century viewer, this Arcadian fantasy may have been seen in terms of an allegory of peace and plenty.

P.M.

---

<sup>i</sup> Expertise written by Dr. Ursula Härting, 11 November.2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Expertise written by Dr. Ursula Härting, 11 November 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> U. Härting & K. Borms, *Abraham Govaerts: Der Waldmaler (1589-1626)*, 2004, p. 61, list more than forty paintings in which Govaerts collaborated with Frans Francken II.

<sup>iv</sup> U. Härting & K. Borms, *ibid.*, p. 61, lists nine paintings in which Govaerts collaborated with Ambrosius Francken II.

<sup>v</sup> Of the eleven, Ambrosius received the highest fee.