

# JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

**VP4970**

**JAN GRIFFIER the Elder**

(Amsterdam c. 1651/52 – 1718 London)

A mountainous River Landscape with an Inn in  
the Foreground

Indistinctly signed, lower left: *J GRIFFIE...*

Oil on copper, 15 x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$  ins. (54.3 x 64.9 cm)



**PROVENANCE**

Anonymous sale, Brussels, Fievez, 7 July 1926, lot 85

George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Sutherland (1888-1963)

Thence by descent

The Estate of the Rt. Hon. The Countess of Sutherland, until 2021

The prolific painter and etcher Jan Griffier was born in Amsterdam, probably around 1651-52. After training in his hometown with the landscapist Roelant Roghman (1627-86), he moved to London, where he worked for much of his career. He was a versatile artist whose repertoire included topographical views, landscapes with Italianate ruins, and Rhineland river landscapes, for which he is best known today. He was one of the most highly esteemed landscapists in contemporary England, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Beaufort, among others.

Although Rhenish landscapes such as the present painting were Griffier's speciality, he does not appear ever to have visited the Rhineland. He travelled widely in England and the Netherlands, but his imaginary Rhineland scenes were most likely inspired by those of the Rotterdam painter Herman Saftleven (1609-1685), with which he must have been very familiar. Typically, Griffier's Rhenish fantasies depict an elevated view of a river valley, enlivened with picturesque castles and villages, river traffic and numerous small figures. In many respects, such views can be seen as a return to the stylised representation of nature presented in similar landscapes by such late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Flemish painters as Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), Joos de Momper (1564-1635), and others. Also reminiscent of Jan Brueghel the Elder is Griffier's penchant for exacting detail and rich, enamel-like colours.

In this characteristic example, a panorama of a broad river valley spreads out before the viewer from a high vantage point. Bare, rugged mountains rise on the far side of the river, while on the near side, village houses nestle among trees on a hillside that slopes gently to the valley floor where the turrets of a walled city and a castle can be seen. The riverbank below is teeming with activity: a variety of river craft is moored alongside and a crowd has gathered nearby before a cluster of tents and other temporary structures. A flag is flying: a country fair, or kermis, is evidently underway. In the left foreground, festival-goers climb a steep escarpment to the local hostelry which is clearly doing a roaring trade. Everyone is enjoying a day out. A bagpiper and a fiddler pump out a tune, and there is much drinking and jollity: some are rather the worse for wear. The high degree of finish and miniature-like detail in this landscape is enhanced by the artist's use of a copper support.

We are told that Griffier's views of this type found an appreciative audience in England<sup>i</sup>. He had arrived in London soon after the Great Fire of 1666 no doubt attracted by the prospects of well-paid work in the English capital. Unlike in the Dutch Republic, where the economy was in decline from around 1660 and the demand for paintings stagnating, the art market in London was on the up. The Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 had led to a reform of the economy and an increase in overseas trade, while the Great Fire gave rise to a boom in the building industry and an unprecedented demand for the fine and decorative arts. Griffier was not alone in taking advantage of the favourable economic conditions and burgeoning art market, though he was among the first of many Dutch artists to journey across the North Sea in search of a new market for his wares. Apart from a period of about eight to ten years from 1696-1704 during which he worked in The Netherlands, Griffier lived in England until his death in 1718.

## BIOGRAPHY

Jan Griffier was born in Amsterdam, but his date of birth is uncertain. The artist's biographer Arnold Houbraken informs us that he was born in 1656<sup>i</sup>, but Horace Walpole said that he was 72 years old in 1718<sup>iii</sup>, suggesting a birth date around 1645. A perhaps more reliable source is a reference to Griffier in the *Album studiosorum* of the university art academy in Leiden in which it is stated that in 1700 he was 48 years old and living on the *Stadstimmerwerf*: thus he must have been born around 1651-52. Walpole wrote that he was apprenticed to a flower painter before becoming a pupil of the etcher and landscape painter Roelant Roghman, in Amsterdam. Around 1667, Griffier moved to London, where he continued his studies under the Dutch landscape painter Jan Looten (1618-c. 1681). In 1677, he was admitted as a 'free-brother' of the Company of Painter-Stainers, contributing a *Landscape with Ruins* to their hall. According to Walpole, he lived on his own boat on the Thames in which he also often travelled while sketching the scenery. To judge from his topographical views, he was acquainted with many British cities, including London, Windsor, Oxford and Gloucester. Around 1696, Griffier returned to the Netherlands in his boat with a large collection of paintings which he hoped to sell there, but he was shipwrecked off the coast near Rotterdam and lost most of his stock. In Rotterdam, he again bought a boat on which he lived a peripatetic life, traversing the inland waterways of the Dutch Republic for about ten years. He returned to London around 1704 and moved into a house at Millbank. He enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Beaufort. He died in his house at Millbank in 1718, aged seventy-two. After his death, an auction of his pictures took place at Covent Garden.

Griffier was married at last three times: in 1674 to Jane Gilborthorp, in 1687, to Anne Brookes and later to Mary Jones. His son Robert Griffier (1688-c.1750) and grandson Jan Griffier II (*fl.* 1738-73) continued the family landscape tradition.

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<sup>i</sup> H. V. S. Ogden, *English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century*, Ann Arbor, 1955, p. 121.

<sup>ii</sup> A. Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen*, 3 vols, Amsterdam 1718-21, vol. 3, pp.357-60.

<sup>iii</sup> H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, vol. 3, 1763, pp. 46-48.