

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

CS0338

AERT VAN DER NEER

(c. 1603/4 – Amsterdam - 1677)

A Winter Landscape with Skaters



Signed, lower right in double monogram
Oil on canvas, 29¾ x 43¾ ins. (75.5 x 110 cm)

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Groningen, until 1826

Probably Colonel Biré, Brussels

Héris collection, Brussels (reputedly bought from the above) by 1826

His sale, Paris, Paillet, 25 March 1841, lot 35

Etienne le Roy, Brussels

His sale, Paris, Paillet, 18 April 1842

William Wellesley, Earl of Mornington, Château d'Ixelles

His sale, Château d'Ixelles, Le Roy, 15 June 1846, lot 23, for 3500 francs to Tardieu

Tardieu sale, Paris, Simonet, 4 February 1851, lot 26

Piérard Collection, Valenciennes

His deceased sale, Paris, Laneuville, 20 March 1860, lot 50

J. J. Ten Bos, Almelo

Henry Louis Bischoffsheim (1829-1909), Bute House, South Audley Street, London

Sold by order of his Trustees, London, Christie's, 7 May 1926, lot 74, for £577.10s to Duits, London

With J. Leger, London, 1928

With D. Katz, Dieren, 1933

Anonymous sale, 15 July 1936 (listed by Schulz below)

With Schaeffer Galleries, New York, 1936-37

J. F. van Abbe, Aalst

His sale, Paris, Charpentier, 25 April 1952, lot 52

With Agnew's, London, 1984

With Cramer, The Hague, 1984, no. 35

Private collection, until 2012

Sale, Sotheby's, London, 4 July 2012, lot 22

With Johnny Van Haeften Limited, London, 2012

Private collection, Switzerland, until 2018

EXHIBITED

Winterlandschappen, Amsterdam, 1932, no. 57

Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum & Arnhem, Gemeente Museum, 1934

Nijmegen, Huize Belvoir, 1936, no. 38

Great Dutch Masters, New York, 1936, no. 11

Detroit Institute of Arts (lent by D. Katz)

Dutch Paintings of the 17th Century, Indianapolis, John Herron Art Museum, 1937, no. 47

Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, 1938, no. 51

Dutch Painting in the 17th Century, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum; Los Angeles, Los Angeles Museum and Providence, Rhode Island, 1938, no. 33

Oude Kunst in Brabants Bezit, Tilburg, 1948, no. 45

LITERATURE

C. Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue raisonné*, vol. VII, London, 1923, pp. 331-332, no. 10
("the picture may be regarded as the most important of its kind")

Burlington Magazine, December 1928, illustrated

W. Schulz, *Aert van der Neer*, Doornspijk 2002, p. 182, no. 196, reproduced fig. 61 (as present whereabouts unknown)

This painting is a classic example of van der Neer's winter landscapes. Hofstede de Groot was unrestrained in his praise of the picture, writing that it "may be regarded as the most important of its kind. The colouring is brilliant and the movement of the figures is convincingly rendered", while Schulz described it as "ambitious"ⁱ.

The scene depicts a frozen canal stretching to the horizon, flanked on either side by snow-covered buildings and leafless trees. On the left bank is a row of gabled houses, while on the right rise the fortified walls of a city, a substantial church and in the distance, a windmill. The near shoreline is defined by a few pollarded willows, a dilapidated fence and a fringe of reeds: a boat is stuck fast in the ice close to the bank. Scores of people have taken to the ice and are enjoying the pleasures of the season: some skate, play *kolf* or push sledges, while others ride in sleighs drawn by gaily caparisoned horses. In the immediate foreground, a well-dressed couple, with an infant in arms and an older boy, walks on a path by the canal. Gripping the handle of his sledge, the youngster gazes in wonder at the antics on the ice: just in front of him, a man speeding by with a sledge has hit some rough ice at the water's edge, pitching his missus onto the slippery ground. Further on, a man who has taken a tumble is helped to his feet. Overhead, a cloud-filled sky holds the promise of snow and a chill air pervades the scene.

Hofstede de Groot recognised the location as a view on the River Amstel in Amsterdam, identifying the city walls on the right of the composition as the old town gate, demolished in 1841, to be replaced by the "Lovers' Bridge". Such topographical fidelity would, however, be atypical of van der Neer, whose primary concern was to capture the essential character of winter. His painting of *Amsterdam in the Winter with the Oude Schans and Montelbaanstoren*ⁱⁱ of about 1662 is an exception to this rule.

Aert van der Neer specialised in painting winter landscapes and river views under particular lighting conditions, such as dawn, dusk, or moonlight. His views of skaters on frozen waterways are descended from the Flemish tradition, via the work of the Dutch winter landscapist Hendrick Avercamp. Van der Neer's earliest dated winter scene is from 1641 and there are dated examples from the mid- to later 1640s, but dated paintings from later in his career are virtually unknown. Consequently, the chronology of his mature oeuvre can only be approximately gauged, based on stylistic considerations, or in some cases, the style of the figures' clothing. From about 1660, winter scenes dominated van der Neer's output. We can only speculate as to why this might have been the case. Perhaps the market for moonlit paintings had by then been sated, or as Schulz suggests, "possibly both the artist and his buyers had realised that his true genius, not fully recognised until then, lay in his winter landscapes"ⁱⁱⁱ. In any event, Schulz assigns the present painting to the years around the mid- to late 1660s, by which time the artist had fully matured. The lively concentration of figures on the frozen waterway is characteristic of this period, as is the painterly, almost impressionistic handling, which conveys a powerful sense of the people moving about on the ice.

Having established the basic elements of design by 1645^{iv}, the compositions of van der Neer's winter landscapes varied only slightly during the course of his career. He generally chose a vantage point that gave him a central or slightly angled view across a broad expanse of ice, with retreating banks on both sides, and occasionally adding a strip of land that sweeps back

along the shore. Darkened *repoussoirs*, such as silhouetted trees, reeds, logs or boats, enhance the spatial recession. Whilst such compositional formulae had long since been developed by his predecessors, his chief innovations were in his use of coloured light to evoke different atmospheric or meteorological conditions. This painting bears witness to his acute sensitivity to the nuances of light and atmosphere, which find its most complete expression in his palette of icy blues, greens and grey, alleviated by touches of warm ochre and brown in the figures' clothing and tints of pale yellow in the overcast sky.

BIOGRAPHY

Aert (Aernout) van der Neer was born in 1603 or 1604 in Gorinchem, a flourishing trading city situated on the river Waal, to the east of Rotterdam and south of Utrecht. He was the son of Egerom (or Igrom) Aertsz. van der Neer, a *majoor* (steward or estate manager) at Fort Suikerberg in Klundert (North Brabant) and his wife, Aeltje Jansdr. According to Arnold Houbraken, in his youth the artist also served as a *majoor* for the lords of Arkel, who had an estate in the village of Arkel, just north of Gorinchem. It is not known where or with whom van der Neer trained as an artist. However, by 1629, the year he married Lijsbeth Govaertsdr. in Amsterdam, his marriage certificate described him as a "painter 25 years old". It seems that the couple had settled in Amsterdam by the early 1630s, but it is possible that van der Neer had moved there several years earlier. The dates of birth of the couple's two eldest sons, Eglon, who later became a successful genre painter, and Johannes, are not recorded. However, two other sons, Pieter (1640 – before 1648) and Pieter II (1648 – before 1683) and daughters, Cornelia (1642-1683) and Lijsbeth (1645 – before 1675) were baptised in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam.

Like a number of seventeenth-century artists, van der Neer also had a second occupation. In 1659, he was described as the keeper of a tavern called "de Graeff van Hollant" in the Kalverstraat, with his son Johannes. On 25 January 1662 he was again mentioned in a list of innkeepers, but on 12 December the same year declared bankruptcy. In an inventory of his possessions drawn up at that time, his own paintings were appraised at relatively low values, mostly five guilders or less. He continued to paint, living in a state of extreme poverty on the Kerkstraat, until his death on 9 November 1677.

P.M.

ⁱ W. Schulz, *Aert van der Neer*, Doornspijk, 2002, p. 88

ⁱⁱ W. Schulz, *ibid.*, cat. no. 99, ill. 54.

ⁱⁱⁱ W. Schulz, *ibid.*, p. 86

^{iv} Aert van der Neer, *Winter Landscape with Skaters*, monogrammed and dated 1645, oil on panel, 54.5 x 70 cm, Corcoran Gallery, William A. Clark Collection, Washington, DC, inv. no. 26.148.