PHILIPS WOUWERMAN
(1619 - Haarlem – 1668)

A Hawking Party by a Mansion

Signed in monogram lower left
On panel, 19 ¾ x 25 ½ ins (50 x 64.8 cm)

Provenance:
Possibly with the Stadholder of Brussels around 1700
J.P. Snijers, Antwerp
Willem Lormier (1682-1758), the Hague 1752
Sale, The Hague, 4 July 1763, lot 324
Bought on behalf of Sir James Lowther by Captain Baillie
Sir James Lowther, 1st Earl of Lonsdale (1736-1802),
Lowsdale Castle, Cumbria, inv. no. 235
Thence by descent

Literature:
Willem Lormier, Magazine Catalogue Willem Lormier,
December 1754, The Hague, no. 337
Gerard Hoet, Catalogus of Naamlijst van schilderijen met
derzelver prijzen..., 3 vols, The Hague 1752-1770, vol. 2,
p. 446
Pieter Terwesten, Catalogus of Naamlijst van Schilderijen,
November 1768 verkogt, The Hague 1770, no. 335
John Smith, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the
Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters, 1829,
no. 53 and 1842, no. 53
Gustav F. Waagen, Treasures of Art in Great Britain,
3 vols, London 1854, vol. 3, p. 262
Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, Beschreibendes und kritisches
Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen
1908, no. 539
Birgit Schumacher, Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668) The
Horse Painter of the Golden Age, The Netherlands 2006,
vol. 1, no. 225a
An elegant hawking party appears before the walls of a large country house. The hunters have recently returned and the spoils of the day are laid out on the ground. Several couples have dismounted and now relax on the grass to the right, while their servants set out a picnic. On the left, a falconer holds his bird aloft, while grooms water the horses and dogs at a fountain, sculpted in the form of a conch-blowing putto. A peacock perches on a stone pedestal, beneath a statue of Charity and, glimpsed beyond the garden wall, are graceful, tall trees and a statue of a fighting gladiator. In the background, a hilly Italianate landscape extends into a blue haze.

Philips Wouwerman was the most accomplished and successful Dutch seventeenth-century painter of horses. These usually feature prominently in his small cabinet pictures, which combine landscape and genre elements. Naturally, he sought out equestrian subjects to display his talents, including simple, unpretentious scenes of farriers, stables, riding schools and travellers at rest, as well as larger, multi-figured compositions of hunting parties, army encampments and cavalry battles.

A Hawking Party by a Mansion is characteristic of Wouwerman’s style from the final years of his life. The painting displays the elegant figures and richness of anecdote, as well as the somewhat sombre tonality, with accents of deep red, which are particularly associated with the artist’s works from the mid-1660s. Wouwerman had depicted hunt scenes throughout his career, but in the decade preceding his death in 1668, hunting became the dominant theme of his oeuvre. It goes without saying that the subject offered him the ideal opportunity to depict horses and elegantly-dressed people in the setting of grand architecture. His paintings encompass many aspects of hunting: the departure of the hunting party, the pursuit of diverse types of prey, the rest during the hunt and the return from hunting are all depicted in endless variations. In seventeenth-century Netherlands, hunting was a privilege of the nobility and strictly regulated by the Court in The Hague. Wouwerman’s many images of hunting thus denote social distinction, which no doubt commended them to wealthy, aristocratic patrons.

As is often the case with Wouwerman’s scenes of hunting, this painting contains amorous overtones. The setting for the day’s sport, close to a fountain, recalls the traditional love garden. To the seventeenth-century viewer, it would have been obvious that love is the subtext in this scene and hunting should be understood metaphorically. The hunters are clearly in pursuit of love: in Dutch, “hunting the hare” meant to have sex, while catching a bird equated to making love (“vogelen”). The elegant young people depicted are evidently indulging their pleasures: they eat, drink and flirt with one another. One of the young men teases his companion’s lapdog with his hawk, in a provocative manner, while the other reclines in the arms of a lady-friend, who places a garland of flowers in his hair. A second lady waves a garland playfully over the couple, seemingly intent on bestowing it upon the same young man. A suggestively-shaped flask and drinking vessel lie on the grass nearby, both allusions to erotic love. In scenes of this type, which have their origins in the Haarlem genre of the merry company outdoors, Wouwerman is only a short step from the fêtes galantes of the French Rococo.

The eldest son of the painter Paulus Joosten Wouwerman, Philips was baptised in Haarlem on 24 May 1619. His younger brothers, Pieter and Jan, also became artists
and painted in the style of Philips. Wouwerman probably took his first instruction in painting from his father but according to Cornelis de Bie, he was a pupil of Frans Hals, none of whose influence, however, is evident. In 1638, against the wishes of his family, Wouwerman travelled to Hamburg to marry a Catholic girl named Annetje Pietersz. van Broeckhof. While in Hamburg, he worked briefly in the studio of the German history painter, Evert Decker. By 1640, he had returned to Haarlem where he joined the guild: he was elected vinder in 1646. He seems to have remained in Haarlem for the rest of his life. He died on 19 May 1668 and was buried in the Nieuwe Kerk in Haarlem.

Though he lived to be only forty-eight years old, Wouwerman was one of the most successful and prolific artists of the Dutch Golden Age and around a thousand works bear his name. He occasionally painted staffage in the landscapes of Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan Wijnants and Cornelis Decker. He had numerous pupils and followers and died a wealthy man, leaving a substantial inheritance to his three sons and four daughters. During the eighteenth century, he became one of the most highly esteemed Dutch painters in Europe: no princely collection was complete without one of his paintings.

P.M.