

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

CS0367

PHILIPS WOUWERMAN

(1619 – Haarlem - 1668)

An extensive Landscape with a Stag Hunt

Signed with monogram, lower right
Oil on panel, 12½ x 16½ ins. (31.7 x 41.9 cm)



PROVENANCE

Possibly the painting mentioned by Hofstede de Groot in the sale of the collection of Jan de Gise in Bonn, 30 August 1742, lot 105 ("A Stag Hunt, 13 x 16 inches")

Robert White

His sale *et al.*, Christie's, 16 February 1861, lot 105, 31 Guineas to Graves (as Hackaert)

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 25 April 2001, lot 14

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, London, 9 December 2015, lot 38 (The property of a lady)

Where acquired by the present owner

Private collection, Germany, until 2021

LITERATURE:

Possibly C. Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, Essingen & Paris, 1908, vol. 2, p. 450, no. 630f.

In an extensive landscape, a hunting party chases a stag into a river. Several hounds and riders pursue their prey into the water. A gentleman in a red jacket and an elegantly dressed lady follow up the rear, attended by a servant running on foot. Behind them, seated unobtrusively in the shade of some trees is a peasant woman with a small child, and further along a narrow path is a couple of locals, one astride a laden donkey and the other walking on foot with a dog. A broad vista, dotted with Italianate buildings, opens up in the left background, offering a prospect of distant hills and lakes. The whole landscape is bathed in the golden light of late afternoon.

Philips Wouwerman was the most successful Dutch seventeenth-century painter of equestrian scenes. He developed a wide repertoire of themes that allowed him to demonstrate his virtuosity at rendering horses. His subjects include simple, unpretentious scenes of farriers, stables, riding schools and travellers at rest, as well as larger, multi-figured compositions of hunting parties, country fairs, army encampments and cavalry battles. He was unusually prolific and, despite a relatively short career, left an oeuvre numbering nearly six hundred paintings. According to Houbraken he died a rich man.

Hunting scenes in various forms were Wouwerman's favourite subjects. He painted them throughout his career, but in the last decade of his life they dominate his oeuvre. He depicted all aspects of the sport, from the departure of the hunting party, to the pursuit of diverse types of prey, the rest during the hunt and the return of the hunting party, in constantly varied compositions. The subject not only offered him the opportunity to exercise his talents at depicting lively scenes filled with horses and elegantly dressed people, but also found an eager audience. Whilst traditionally hunting had been the exclusive preserve of the nobility and high-ranking officers of state, by the second half of the seventeenth century, the booming Dutch economy had given rise to a newly wealthy urban elite which aspired to imitate the lifestyle of the old landed aristocracy. Thus, pictures with a hunting theme - whether of hunting itself, still lifes of hunting trophies and accessories, or portraits of sitters in hunting dress – held a special appeal for members of this status-conscious class.

With its warm colouring, lightness of touch and lively incident, this hunting scene is characteristic of Wouwerman's mature style. However, it is hard to assign a date to it owing to an almost complete lack of dated works from the last fifteen years of the artist's life, but it probably belongs to his last decade. It was elegant hunting scenes of this type in particular that contributed to Wouwerman's enormous popularity in the eighteenth century in Germany, England and especially in France.

The imprecise descriptions of many hunting scenes in early sources makes it very difficult to identify the early provenance for the present panel. It may be the "Stag Hunt" listed by Hofstede de Groot in the sale of the collection of Jan de Gise in Bonn on 30 August 1742, lot 105 (478 florins). This painting was on a panel of very similar dimensions, but the description is too vague to permit certain identification.

BIOGRAPHY

The eldest son of the painter Pauwels Joostsz. Wouwerman, Philips was baptised in Haarlem on 24 May 1619. His younger brothers, Pieter and Johannes, also became artists and painted in the style of Philips. Wouwerman probably took his first instruction in painting from his father. According to Cornelis de Bie, he subsequently became a pupil of Frans Hals, but there is no trace of Hals's influence in his work. In 1638, against the wishes of his family, Wouwerman travelled to Hamburg to marry a Catholic girl named Annetje Pietersdr. 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. In 1646 he served as a member of the guild's executive committee (as *vinder* or agent). 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. His wife survived him by less than two years and was interred in St. Bavo's Church on 24 January 1670.

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. 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.