

Bijl-Van Urk

Aelbert Cuyp

1620 - Dordrecht - 1690

A Landscape with Cattle Grazing on a Bank, the Town of Dordrecht Beyond

Oil on panel 40 x 55.4 cm

Signed lower right: "Acuÿp"

Datable 1653-55

Provenance

Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner (1880-1958), curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and subsequently Director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, California, by 1913, from whom acquired by Agnew's, below
With Agnew's, London, 1919, from whom acquired by Jacques Goudstikker, presumably on behalf of Anton Philips, recorded in 1928 as hanging in the salon at De Laak, and by descent
Sale London (Christie's), 6 December 2007, lot 10, ill.

Literature

A. Chong, *Aelbert Cuyp and the Meaning of Landscape*, PhD thesis University of New York 1992, p. 464 (not seen, not attributed)

A herd of cows sojourns in a verdant meadow surrounded by shallow hills. An uninterrupted view is offered to a distant horizon punctuated by the tower of Dordrecht's Grote Kerk. A golden light comes from the left. The brightly lit cows are sharply set off against magnificent gray cloud formations.

Cuyp probably was the first Dutch artist who represented the theme of a herd of cows with a sense of dignity and grandeur. Predecessors such as Roelant Savery or Cornelis Saftleven depicted these animals as caricaturally clumsy and dim-witted. Through his fastidious observation of them Cuyp, on the contrary, shows cows as individuals and endowed with grace and elegance, and he even lends them a certain nobility.

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The present work belongs to a group of similar paintings dating from the late 1640s and early 1650s in which Cuyp achieves an overwhelming effect of space. In this Cuyp was following the lead of Simon de Vlieger and Italianate artists, such as Jan Asselijn and Claes Berchem, who had been experimenting with these innovative features with great success these very years. The impressive cloudscape is in particular reminiscent of De Vlieger's works from the 1640s, while the large shapes in the foreground in combination with a distant panoramic view were inspired by recent works by Asselijn *cum suis*.

Cuyp solely concentrated on the animals, omitting the herdsman and his dogs. The only sign of human presence is provided in the skyline, where the town of Dordrecht can be made out in the hazy distance. Cuyp's scene is pervaded with an elegiac mood. In terms of subject and composition our painting can be compared to Cuyp's somewhat larger panel of a *River Landscape with Cows* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (inv. 1986.70.I), which no doubt dates from around the same years as our painting. The Christie's catalogue entry quotes Cuyp scholar Alan Chong: "The signature is of the type Aelbert Cuyp employed from 1653 to about 1655, and the treatment of the sky is a product of the artist's maturity. Whereas earlier skies consist of swirling masses of dark grey, vigorously applied, the greys in this sky are significantly lighter in tone and more relaxed in impasto. Importantly, the edges of the clouds facing the sun are painted with broken streaks of white, tinged subtly with pink and orange – a characteristic of Cuyp's later work". Our painting is an excellently preserved specimen of Cuyp's most archetypical subject matter. With its lyrical and naturalistic portrayal of light it displays all the iconic qualities for which Cuyp is rightly famous.

The present painting boasts an impeccable provenance, having belonged to the great art historian Wilhelm Valentiner. After passing through the hands of Jacques Goudstikker, one of the most distinguished art dealers and tastemakers of his age, the picture came in possession of Anton Philips in 1919. It remained in his family and was for many decades out of sight of scholars until it surfaced in the Christie's sale of the Philips Collection in 2007.

Aelbert Cuyp was born into a family of artists, the first being his grandfather Gerrit Gerritsz Cuyp (c. 1565 - 1644), a stained glass designer and a painter from Venlo. The latter's son and Aelbert's father, Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp, made a career as an artist in Dordrecht. Aelbert trained with his versatile father who excelled in a broad range of genres, from portraits to history pieces, still lifes and genre paintings. In the first half of the 1640s father and son collaborated on paintings but Aelbert already signed his first

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independent works in 1639. In 1652 Aelbert traveled along the Rhine to Nijmegen, Elten and Cleves meanwhile sketching the views he encountered on his way. In 1659 Cuyp married the wealthy widow Cornelia Boschman. She bore him one daughter, Arendina. It is assumed that after his marriage Cuyp virtually stopped painting. At any rate, through his marriage Cuyp acquired considerable status among the Dordrecht elite and he would from then on take on various administrative positions in the town's public life. For instance, he became deacon of the Reformed Church in 1660/61 and served as regent of the Heilige Geest- and Pesthuis ter Grote Kerk from 1673 and he became a member of the Hoge Vierschaar of Southern Holland in 1679, maintaining this position until 1682.