

# Bijl-Van Urk

## Jacob van Ruisdael

Haarlem 1628/29 - 1682 Amsterdam

*Winter Landscape with a View on a Town, Probably Doesburg*

Oil on canvas 36 x 41 cm

Signed lower right: "Ruisda [...]"

Datable second half 1670s or later

### Provenance

Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian-Shansky (1827-1914), St. Petersburg

With Jacques Goudstikker, Amsterdam, 1932

With D. Katz, Dieren, by 1934

Sale Lucerne (Fischer), 3-7 September 1935, lot 2185, ill.

With Gebroeders Douwes, Amsterdam, 1938

Private collection, Bussum

### Exhibited

Amsterdam, Goudstikker, *Tentoonstelling van Hollandsche winterlandschappen uit de 17e eeuw*, 1932, nr. 98

Dieren, Katz Gallery; Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum, *Tentoonstelling van schilderijen van Oud-Hollandsche meesters*, 1934, nr. 59

Amsterdam, Gebroeders Douwes, *Jubileumstentoonstelling Kunsthandel gebr. Douwes 1805-1955*, 1955-56, nr. 54

### Literature

*Études sur les peintres des écoles hollandaise, flamande et néerlandaise qu'on trouve dans la collection Semenov et les autres collections publiques et privées de St-Pétersbourg*, 1906, pp. cxvi, 180, nr. 464

C. Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols., Esslingen & Paris 1907-28, vol. 4, nr. 1004

J. Rosenberg, *Jacob van Ruisdael*, Berlin 1928, nr. 624

S. Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings, Drawings and Etchings*, New Haven & London 2001, nr. 667, p. 471, ill.

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A small group of fashionable dressed figures defies the cold and converses on the frozen moat near a town. More people can be seen scattered across the landscape, shrouded as it is in a thin fog. The murky winter sky barely allows sunlight to come through. One can easily imagine the icy wind howling.

Winter views occupy a small but important place in Jacob van Ruisdael's preserved output. Around thirty are still known and Ruisdael probably did not paint many more. Since none of them bear a date their chronology is somewhat hypothetical. It is surmised that Ruisdael painted his first extant examples in the mid 1650s but he may have started even later, in the 1660s. With its oblong format as opposed to being upright our painting deviates from many winters but it is like many of them modest in size. For some, not yet clarified, reason the artist deemed small dimensions appropriate. The great Ruisdael scholar Seymour Slive has dated our painting to the artist's final years. The silhouette of the figures in the foreground echo the fashion of the later 1670s and early 1680s, confirming Slive's idea.

The detailed rendering of the houses and other buildings in this painting raise the question whether Ruisdael depicted a specific place. It is striking that most of Ruisdael's winter scenes are situated in or near a village or town. Ruisdael was obviously fascinated by the phenomenon of wintery coldness seizing control over populated areas, determining the lives of their inhabitants. He loved to paint the snow-covered rooftops of the houses and human figures play a more prominent role in these scenes than in his other landscapes. Although Ruisdael was not a particularly skilled figure painter he enjoyed portraying the many different ways in which people react to wintery coldness. This penchant for anecdotal detail greatly adds to the appeal of these scenes, as it does in our work.

No doubt, several of these other winter scenes displaying architecture of some sort are topographical, but very few locations have been identified so far. It is quite plausible that Jacob van Ruisdael depicted Naarden as seen from the north-west. To be sure, Ruisdael was familiar with Naarden, where his uncle Salomon van Ruysdael was born, and especially in his early career he devoted some drawings and paintings, among them a panoramic view (Madrid, Museo Thyssen), to it. However, the similarities of the present view with visual records of that town are somewhat superficial. Laurens Schoemaker, the topography specialist of the Dutch Institute of Art History in The Hague, thinks the view may represent the town of Doesburg in Gelderland. On the left, he says, we see the city's windmill on a wall of rammed earth, the drawbridge and the square tower according to him is one of the city's entrance gates; the Veerpoort. Schoemaker consulted several experts specialized in the historical town of Doesburg and its environs and all of them confirm his tentative identification. One of them even recognized the tiny tower between gate and the church as the tower of the town hall. No other views on Doesburg by Ruisdael are known.

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Jacob van Ruisdael's year of birth is deduced from a document of 1661, in which he stated his age as 32. His father, Isaack van Ruisdael, was a painter, a frame maker and a picture dealer. Undoubtedly, Jacob studied with him and possibly also with his uncle, Salomon van Ruysdael. His earliest landscapes are dated 1646. Dated drawings from that year are preserved as well. During his first years of productivity he also made some etchings. In 1648, Jacob joined the Guild of St. Luke in his native town Haarlem. In these years he paid visits to Naarden and Egmond and recorded his impressions in drawings, which he later used for paintings. Around 1650 he travelled with his friend Claes Berchem to the area along the Dutch-German border. In 1656 or slightly later Ruisdael moved to Amsterdam, where he received citizenship in 1659. He remained in Amsterdam for the rest of his life and died a bachelor. Meindert Hobbema is Ruisdael's only documented pupil, but his influence extended to a large group of contemporary landscape painters, among them Guillaume Dubois, Cornelis Decker, Roelof van Vries, Salomon Rombouts and Jan van Kessel.