



**Jacob van Ruisdael**

Haarlem 1628/29 - 1682 Amsterdam

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

Oil on canvas 36 x 41 cm

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

Datable 1675-82

**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.

# *Bijl-Van Urk*

A group of fashionable dressed figures converse on a frozen moat just outside a town. More people defy the cold to enjoy the wintery setting that is shrouded in a thin fog. The murky sky barely allows sunlight to come through. One can easily imagine the icy wind howling.

Only around thirty winter views by Ruisdael are still known and the artist probably did not paint many more.<sup>1</sup> Since none bear a date, their chronology remains hypothetical. Ruisdael's first examples may stem either from the mid 1650s or from the 1660s. The great Ruisdael scholar Seymour Slive has dated our painting to the artist's final years. The fashion of the figures in the foreground tallies with the late 1670s and early 1680s, and confirms Slive's idea.

Many of the winter landscapes have an upright format and, just as our painting, they are often small. The artist deemed an intimate scale appropriate to the subject. Indeed, the cabinet size does make the wintery coldness seem less intimidating, while inviting the viewer close to the picture plane to admire the many details. It is also striking that most of Ruisdael's winter scenes are situated in or near a village or town. Ruisdael was 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 usually play a more prominent role in these scenes than in his other landscapes.

The detailed rendering of the houses and other buildings in our painting convinces us that Ruisdael depicted a specific place. No doubt, several of these other winter scenes with architecture of some sort are topographical, but few locations have been identified so far. The church spire reminds of Naarden, a town Ruisdael knew well, and it cannot be ruled out that Ruisdael depicted this town as seen from the north-west, permitting himself some artistic licence.<sup>2</sup> A stronger case may be made to identify the view with the town of Doesburg in Gelderland.<sup>3</sup> Consistent with seventeenth-century Doesburg is that we see, from left to right, the city's windmill on a wall of rammed earth, the drawbridge over the town's moat, the square tower would be one of the city's entrance gates; the Veerpoort, and the Grote or Martini Church. The tiny tower between gate and the church may be the tower of the town hall. No other views on Doesburg by Ruisdael are known as yet.

Ruisdael's winter scenes struck a chord with artists and connoisseurs in the Romantic era, and later. The well-known critic Dr. Gustav Waagen in 1835 saw one in the collection of Sir Robert Peel (presently Philadelphia Museum of Art, inv. 1917, 569) and remarked: 'The feeling of Winter is here expressed with more truth than I have ever seen'.<sup>4</sup> In our painting Ruisdael made the cold palpable as well.

The first recorded owner of our painting was the famous Russian geographer and statistician Pyotr Petrovich Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, who passionately collected Dutch and Flemish

# Bijl-Van Urk

painting during his travels through Europe. At the end of his life his collection contained more than 700 paintings. A large part of his collection is still kept in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg.

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 and drawings are dated 1646. 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. 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.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See for this Slive, *op. cit.* (under literature), nrs. 662-694, pp. 469-489.

<sup>2</sup> The artist's uncle Salomon van Ruysdael was born in Naarden, and especially in his early career Ruisdael devoted some drawings and paintings to it, among them a panoramic view (Madrid, Museo Thyssen).

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank Laurens Schoemaker, the topography specialist of the Dutch Institute of Art History in The Hague for his kind help. Schoemaker consulted several experts specialized in the historical town of Doesburg and its environs. These are Rinus Rabeling, chairman of the local museum 'De Rode Toren' in Doesburg, who in his turn consulted J.W. van Petersen, former town archivist of Doesburg, and Nina Herweijer (former director of the Historisch Museum Deventer), and they all judge Doesburg possible.

<sup>4</sup> G.F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, 3 vols., London 1838, vol. 2, p. 21.