NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
*Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*

Meindert Hobbema
Dutch, 1638 - 1709

# *Village near a Pool*

c. 1670

oil on canvas
overall: 81 x 107 cm (31 7/8 x 42 1/8 in.)
Widener Collection 1942.9.32

**ENTRY**

A sunlit village with half-timbered houses sits nestled among trees beyond a small pond. A dirt road, skirting the pond to the right, passes beneath two large trees and leads out of the painting. A falconer, riding a white horse and accompanied by his helper and four dogs, travels along the road, while a fisherman in a red jacket on the near shore casts his line. Although this idyllic scene is neither signed nor dated, it has always been attributed to Hobbema, an attribution that is justified by the compositional schema, the fall of light in the middle distance, the building types, and the delicate touch evident in the landscape in the distant left. The painting has, indeed, many beautiful passages, but it has also suffered badly over the years, and many of its original qualities are no longer evident.

The most disturbing elements in the painting are the two large trees that rise in the right foreground. Their trunks seem too heavy for their size and the branches lack the rhythms characteristic of Hobbema's work. The leaves are also not as clearly articulated as one would expect. These stylistic problems are the result of old Overpaint that was probably applied to cover Abrasion to the surface as well as Pentimenti that became obvious because of the increasing translucency of the paint. Still evident, because of the dense crackle pattern in the paint, is the original


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form of a large branch that extended out just above the steeple of the church and the large tree rising from the village. The trees, however, are not the only areas that have suffered. General abrasion and old overpaint can be found throughout the composition, with only the sunlit area in the center remaining essentially intact.

When the painting was treated in 1974, it was found that much of this old overpaint was extremely hard and could not be removed for fear of damaging the original paint. The distortions in form due to overpainting have been intensified by the denser and darker character of the additions. As a result, the spatial flow of the composition has been affected, and the contrast between, for example, the silhouetted trees and the sky must be greater now than Hobbema originally intended.

Even with the modifications to the image that have occurred, this work can be placed chronologically around 1670. As with *A Farm in the Sunlight*, from 1668, Hobbema has focused his attention on the middle ground and has left the foreground in shadow. The painterly touch, however, is here more delicate, and the rhythms less vigorous than in *A Farm in the Sunlight.* The greenish brown tones of the shadows are also darker and more opaque. The scene has, moreover, an open and spacious quality characteristic of Hobbema's work in the early 1670s, a spaciousness that would have been more pronounced before the overpainting. A painting with similar compositional characteristics is the *Wooded Landscape with Watermill* in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, a work that probably also dates around 1670 and that is freely based on the watermill at Singraven (see discussion under *A Farm in the Sunlight*, and *A View on a High Road*). The village in the Washington painting has not been identified, although it depicts the type of scene Hobbema could have encountered in Overijssel and the eastern provinces of the Netherlands. The character and function of the large rectangular stone blocks that lie randomly yet prominently in the grassy area between the timbered houses and the pond have yet to be explained.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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**TECHNICAL SUMMARY**


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The original support is a tightly woven, plain-weave fabric, lined with the tacking margins removed and the original dimensions retained. The double ground consists of a thick pale ocher lower layer covered by a thin black layer. Paint is applied thinly in dark passages, and with more body and visible brushmarks in lighter passages.

Hobbema appears to have reworked several areas of the composition, particularly the trees at the center, where long, low branches were eliminated from the left sides of the left and central trees. The X-radiographs do not show clearly Hobbema's changes, which are easily confused with later repaints to the extensively abraded trees, though cracks in the paint reveal a long low branch that once extended from the large tree on the left. Due to abrasion in the sky, birds painted out by Hobbema have become visible again at left and center. These were later reinforced with overpaint. Most of the foreground is in good condition, although the cow and horse are abraded and part of the rider's hat is lost. Numerous small losses exist in the sky and lower left foreground.

The painting was lined in 1963. Vandalism in 1966 produced large scratches in a regular grid pattern, which were treated locally. Conservation treatment was carried out in 1974 to remove discolored varnish layers and the more obvious repaints in the sky, water, and trees. The overpainted tree trunks were left as is. In 1981 adjustments were made to the inpainting in the sky, and a pigmented synthetic varnish was applied locally to unify the appearance.

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**PROVENANCE**

Count Santar, Lisbon, and around 1850, London.[1] (Hamburger, Paris); sold 1909 to Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park. Pennsylvania; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeent Century*, 8 vols., trans. Edward G. Hawke, London, 1907-1927: 4:385, no. 47.

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