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

Salomon van Ruysdael
Dutch, 1600/1603 - 1670

River Landscape with Ferry

1649

oil on canvas
overall: 101.5 x 134.8 cm (39 15/16 x 53 1/16 in.)
Inscription: on the ferry below the white horse: Salomon v. Ruysdael. 1649
Patrons' Permanent Fund and The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund. This acquisition was made possible through the generosity of the family of Jacques Goudstikker, in his memory. 2007.116.1

ENTRY

Salomon van Ruysdael delighted in depicting the rhythms of daily life along the banks of the Dutch waterways. Such scenes included boats sailing gently across placid waters, fishermen casting nets under the shadow of overarching trees, and travelers packed tightly into a ferryboat, sharing their ride with wagons, horses, and cattle. One often finds a small village nestled on the distant shore, replete with a large church towering over the gabled homes surrounding it. In *River Landscape with Ferry* Salomon chose to depict a massive turreted stone castle, indicative of the historic role that prominent Dutch families played in establishing the political and social structure of this proud land.

Ruysdael painted this masterpiece in 1649, when the full scope of his artistic personality had come to maturity.[1] The work is imposing in scale and visually compelling, both for its harmonious composition and for the rich variety of its pictorial elements. It has wonderful atmospheric qualities, subtle reflections in the water, and delightful figures crowded into the ferry. The large clump of trees, accented by the rugged white trunk of a broken birch in its midst, centers the composition and, silhouetted against the sky, provides a sturdy framework for the

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people and animals activating the scene. Furthermore, Salomon effectively used this clump to create a deeper sense of space, for not only does the ferry pass in front of the trees, but wagons loaded with passengers also travel behind them.

In this painting one can almost sense the gentle breezes moving across the water and the rustling of leaves under the splendidly fresh, windswept skies. The relatively low-level cumulus clouds passing overhead are of a type found on cool, refreshing days in mid-to-late spring when leaves still have the yellow-green tonalities of new growth.[2] This is also the season of mating for many animals, a strong and compelling instinct that Ruysdael vividly rendered amidst the cattle awaiting a ferry ride. The scene is further enlivened by other entertaining staffage elements, including a boy hitching a ride on the back of the open carriage passing the castle, and the fat and happy Dutch travelers in the carriage on the ferry who share their ride with, among others, a woman clutching a child in her lap. Ferries carried people from all levels of society, and scenes such as this suggest the broad sense of community among the Dutch population during this period.[3]

The painting's fine state of preservation adds to the freshness of the scene. Still visible are vigorous striations left by Ruysdael's brush where it swept across the canvas to create the low clouds near the horizon, striations that disappear in areas where he subsequently inserted buildings, boats, or trees over the wet paint. The delicacy of his touch is also remarkable in the foreground trees, where blue green, pale green, and yellow capture the sparkle of light illuminating the foliage.[4] Ruysdael enhanced this quality of airiness by painting the trees' thin, rhythmic branches with a stiff brush. Strokes of paint applied with this tool are thicker at their edges, and in this way they create a modulated range of color across the width of a branch, an effect that not only gives the trees great visual interest but also creates the appearance of light reflecting off their surfaces.

River Landscape with Ferry has a visual force that reflects the pride they felt in the Dutch Republic around 1648, when the signing of the Treaty of Münster formalized the independence of the Dutch Republic following the Eighty Years' War with Spain. In no other painting, however, does Ruysdael express the sense of well-being as fully as he does in this work. The Dutch could travel throughout their peaceful and prosperous realm by carriage and boat to explore its myriad visual delights without fear of marauders or foreign troops. Many went east, along the Rhine River, to see historic cities such as Nijmegen and Rhenen that had been so important to the formation of the Dutch Republic. Ruysdael may have passed along the same routes, for he depicted cities in the eastern part of the Netherlands

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around mid-century; yet, unlike the case of Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656), no drawings from his hand survive to document any such journey.[5] The large crenulated castle in this painting is a fanciful construct, but it is reminiscent of fortresslike structures situated along the Rhine in the eastern region of the Dutch Republic.[6]

When creating this painting in 1649, Ruysdael built upon a framework developed in a number of his earlier works from that decade.[7] Pictorial precedents exist in paintings by Dutch and Flemish artists of a previous generation, including Jan Brueghel the Elder (Flemish, 1568 - 1625) [fig. 1]. Ruysdael's genius lay in his ability to make each work, even if conceived from his imagination and painted in the studio, seem to be a fresh and direct encounter with nature. The grandeur of this particular image, however, is unmatched by his earlier works and, more than any of his other landscapes, it emphatically introduces the "classical" period of Dutch landscape painting. This type of Dutch art was made famous by a generation of artists that, in addition to Ruysdael, includes Aelbert Cuyp (Dutch, 1620 - 1691), Meindert Hobbema (Dutch, 1638 - 1709), and Salomon's nephew Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682), a group remarkably well represented in the National Gallery of Art collection.

Beyond its outstanding artistic qualities, *River Landscape with Ferry* has had a fascinating place in the complex history of the Nazi and postwar eras that adds to the work's cultural significance. In 1930 Jacques Goudstikker, a prominent Jewish dealer of Old Master paintings in Amsterdam, acquired this painting at a Christie's sale in London (see Provenance). Goudstikker was a great admirer of Ruysdael's work at a time when his importance for the development of Dutch landscape painting was little understood.[8] Goudstikker even organized the first monographic exhibition on the artist in 1936, in which this painting featured prominently.[9] In 1940, however, Goudstikker fled Amsterdam just days prior to the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in May of that year, but he died tragically on the ship that was taking him and his family to safety in London. The Nazis seized Goudstikker's gallery in Amsterdam; this painting and many other works were eventually acquired by Hitler's second-in-command, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring.[10]

After the war, the Allies recovered the painting and turned it over to the Dutch authorities in 1946. A special Dutch Recuperation Commission decided against returning the painting to the family despite years of protest by Goudstikker's widow, Desirée. In 1960 the painting was placed on view at the Rijksmuseum,

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Amsterdam, where it hung in pride of place until 2006. The complex story of the Goudstikker case was reexamined by a special restitution committee in 2005, which recommended that the Dutch government reverse its earlier decision. The painting was returned to the Goudstikker heirs, who sold it privately to the National Gallery in 2007.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *River Landscape*, 1607, oil on copper, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Patrons' Permanent Fund and Nell and Robert Weidenhammer Fund, 2000.4.1

NOTES

[1] This work is one of fourteen paintings by Salomon van Ruysdael that are dated 1649. See Wolfgang Stechow, *Salomon van Ruysdael: Eine Einführung in seine Kunst* (Berlin, 1938; rev. ed., 1975), 140.

[2] I would like to thank David O'C. Starr, Head, Mesoscale Atmospheric Processes Branch, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, for his observations about weather and cloud formations in this painting (correspondence in NGA curatorial files, April 10, 2009).

[3] I would like to thank Perry Chapman (personal communication) for this observation. Ferryboats also occasionally served as the setting for dialogues found in contemporary political pamphlets. See Craig Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht, 1987).

[4] Ruysdael may have, in part, created the light, flickering character of the foliage by applying paint with a sponge or lichen (see Technical Summary). A comparable technique is seen in the foliage in paintings by Jan van der Heyden (see *An Architectural Fantasy* and *View Down a Dutch Canal*).

[5] For Ruysdael's *The Valkhof at Nijmegen*, 1652, and his view of *Rhenen at Sunset*, 1660, see Ariane van Suchtelen and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age* (The Hague, 2008), 164–165, no.

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38; 47, fig. 35.

[6] As is often the case in Ruysdael's work, the castle probably derives from the artist's imagination, in this case perhaps inspired by the castle at Wijk bij Duurstede. See Wolfgang Stechow, *Salomon van Ruysdael: Eine Einführung in seine Kunst* (Berlin, 1938; rev. ed., 1975), 51. Recognizable buildings in imaginary settings are also found in his paintings. See: J. W. Niemeijer, "Het topografisch element in enkele riviergezichten van Salomon van Ruysdael nader beschouwd," *Oud-Holland* 74 (1959): 51–56; H. J. J. Scholtens, "Salomon van Ruysdael in de contreien van Holland's landengte," *Oud-Holland* 77 (1962): 1–10; and Peter C. Sutton, *Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker* (Greenwich, CT, 2008), 172–175, no. 21.

[7] See Peter C. Sutton, *Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker* (Greenwich, CT, 2008) 178, fig. 1, which depicts a painting by Ruysdael, dated 1641, with a comparable composition.

[8] See Wolfgang Stechow, *Salomon van Ruysdael: Eine Einführung in seine Kunst* (Berlin, 1938; rev. ed., 1975), 9, who, in his foreword, laments that Ruysdael's artistic significance in the history of Dutch landscape had been so overlooked by the end of the nineteenth century. He expressly states that he hopes his book will help return the artist to his justified place in the hierarchy of Dutch painters.

[9] *Tentoonstelling van Werken door Salomon van Ruysdael,* Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker N.V., Amsterdam, January–February 1936, no. 34, as *De Veerpont*.

[10] For fuller accountings of this complex story, see Pieter den Hollander, "Recht op de Bocht," in *De Gouden Bocht van Amsterdam*, ed. Milko den Leeuw and Martin Pruijs, (The Hague, 2006), 296–307; Lynn H. Nicholas, "A Long Odyssey: The Goudstikker Collection," in the catalog of the Goudstikker sale, Christie's New York (April 19, 2007), 9–11; and Peter C. Sutton, *Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker* (Greenwich, CT, 2008).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is on a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. The tacking margins have been removed and the painting has been lined. Moderate cusping exists along the sides and top edge. The ground is a thick, white layer and the paint has been vigorously applied using a wet-into-wet technique. Low impasto and clear brushstrokes are found throughout the composition. The tree foliage appears to have been applied with a sponge as well as a brush.

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The painting is in fairly good condition. A long tear is found in the upper left section of the sky and there are numerous tiny craters in the paint, which are most notable in the sky. These craters may have been caused by overheating in a past lining process. The paint and ground have suffered from tenting and flaking in the lower quarter of the painting, resulting in a fair amount of small losses in this area. The painting was treated between 2007 and 2008 to consolidate the paint in this area and to remove discolored varnish and overpaint.

PROVENANCE

Possibly Major Hugh Edward Wilbraham, M.B.E. [1857-1930], Delamere House, near Northwich, Cheshire; by inheritance to his son, George Hugh de Vernon Wilbraham [1890-1962], Delamere House; (his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 18 July 1930, no. 33); (Jacques Goudstikker, Amsterdam);[1] restituted 6 February 2006 to his daughter-in-law, Marei von Saher, Greenwich, Connecticut; purchased 5 November 2007 through (Christie's, New York) by NGA.

[1] The dealer Jacques Goudstikker fled Amsterdam with his wife and son in May 1940, and died in an accident on board the ship on which he left. He left behind most of his gallery's stock of paintings, including the Ruysdael, and with the rest of the Goudstikker paintings, it was confiscated by the Nazis later the same year and delivered to Hermann Göring; see *Rapport inzake de Kunsthandel v.h J Goudstikker NV in oprichtung per 13 September 1940*, Beilage III, Staat van Schilderijen, gekocht M Goering van de "oude" Goudstikker, Access no. 1341, inv. 103, Gemeentearchief, Amsterdam. The painting was recovered by the Allies at the end of World War II and held at the Munich Central Collecting Point (where it was no. 5324), before being returned to the Netherlands in 1948. In the Netherlands, ownership was transferred among several museums, during which time the painting maintained the identifying inventory number NK 2347: Stichting Nederlands Kunstbezit, The Hague, in 1948; Dienst voor's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen, The Hague, 1948-1975; Dienst Verspreide Rijkscollecties, The Hague, 1975-1985; Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, The Hague, 1985-1997; and Instituut Collectie Nederland, Amsterdam, in 1997. Physical custody of the painting was transferred in 1960 to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, where it had the inventory number SK A 3983 and where it remained until 2006. In 2005, the Dutch Advisory Committee on the Assessment of Restitution Applications for Items of

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Cultural Value and the Second World War recommended in favor of the Goudstikker family's claim for the return of this and other paintings that had been confiscated in 1940. The surviving heirs were Marei von Saher, the widow of Goudstikker's son, Edward, and her daughters, Charlène and Chantel, who received the restituted paintings in early 2006.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1930 Nouvelles Acquisitions de la Collection Goudstikker, Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker, Amsterdam; Kunstkring, Rotterdam, 1930-1931, no. 65, repro.

1935 Cinq siècles d'art, Exposition Universelle et Internationale, Brussels, 1935, no. 767, under Paintings, as Le bac.

1936 Tentoonstelling van Oude Kunst, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, April 1936, no. 34, under Paintings, as De Veerpont.

1936 Tentoonstelling van Oude Kunst uit het bezit van den Internationalen Handel, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1936, no. 142, repro., as De Veerpont.

1936 Tentoonstelling van Schilderijen en Antiquiteiten, Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker N.V., Rotterdamschen Kunstkring, December 1936-January 1937, no. 57, repro., as De Veerpont.

1936 Tentoonstelling van Werken door Salomon van Ruysdael, Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker N.V., Amsterdam, January-February 1936, no. 34, as De Veerpont.

1937 Dutch Paintings, Etchings, Drawings, Delftware of the Seventeenth Century, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, 1937, no. 65, repro., as The Ferry Boat.

1946 Herwonnen Kunstbezit, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1946, no. 55.

1946 Paintings Looted from Holland Returned through the Efforts of The United States Armed Forces, multi-venue tour in the United States and Canada, 1946-1948, nos. 36 and 39 (two editions of catalogue), as A Ferry.

1953 Holländer des 17. Jahrhunderts, Kunsthaus Zürich, 1953, no. 134, as Landschaft mit Fähre.

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1954 Dutch Painting: The Golden Age. An Exhibition of Dutch Pictures of the Seventeenth Century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art; Art Gallery of Toronto, 1954-1955, no. 73, repro., as The Ferry Boat.

1954 Mostra di Pittura Olandese del Seicento, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; Palazzo Reale, Milan, January-April 1954, no. 133 (Rome catalogue), no. 136 (Milan catalogue).

2008 Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker, Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut; The Jewish Museum, New York; The Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, and other United States venues, 2008-2010, no. 22, repro. (shown only in Greenwich, New York, and San Antonio).

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1936 Heppner, Arnold. *Internationale Kunstwelt* 1936): 32, ill. 2.

1936 Heppner, A. "Salomon van Ruysdael: Spezialausstellung bei Goudstikker in Amsterdam." *Internationale Kunstwelt* (February 1936): 32, ill. 2.

1938 Stechow, Wolfgang. *Salomon van Ruysdael, eine Einführung in seine Kunst*. Berlin, 1938: 124, no. 358, pl. 24, no. 33

1952 Gerson, Horst. *De Nederlandse Schilderkunst, vol. 2: Het tijdperk van Rembrandt en Vermeer*. De Schoonheid van Ons Land, 11. Amsterdam, 1952: 44, fig. 122.

1962 Meijer, Emile R. "Salomon Jacobszoon van Ruysdael (kort na 1600-1670) 'Rivierlandschap met veerpont'." *Kunstschrift Openbaar Kunstbezit* 6 (1962): 35a-35b, repro.

1975 Stechow, Wolfgang. *Salomon van Ruysdael: eine Einführung in seine Kunst: mit kritischem Katalog der Gemälde*. Revised 2nd ed. Berlin, 1975: 123, no. 358, pl. 24, fig. 33.

1976 Thiel, Pieter J. J. van, et al. *All the Paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: a completely illustrated catalogue*. Translated by Gary Schwartz and Marianne Buikstra-de Boer. Maarssen, 1976: 489, no. A3983, repro.

2008 Sutton, Peter C. *Reclaimed: paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker*. Exh. cat. Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut; The Jewish Museum, New York. Greenwich and New Haven, 2008: 176-179, no. 22.

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