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

Aelbert Cuyp
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

Herdsmen Tending Cattle

1655/1660

oil on canvas
overall: 66 x 87.6 cm (26 x 34 1/2 in.)
framed: 88.9 x 109.9 x 3.8 cm (35 x 43 1/4 x 1 1/2 in.)
Inscription: lower left: A.cuijp
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.59

ENTRY

This painting of herders and cattle situated along an inland waterway and near an evocative ruin has arcadian rather than agricultural associations. In this respect it parallels a rich literary tradition that glorified the values of country life. These ideals, espoused by P. C. Hooft, J. van Heemskerck, and other Dutch writers and playwrights of the seventeenth century, seemed to have had particular resonance in and around Dordrecht.[1]

As is mentioned in the entry for Cuyp's *River Landscape with Cows*, the artist's father and teacher, Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–1652), painted a number of pastoral scenes in the 1630s and 1640s that had a profound influence on his son's early style and choice of subject matter.[2] By the time Cuyp executed this work his style had evolved to the point where the rhythms of the landscape, the foliage, and the clouds had been fully transformed. Even though the theme has Dutch precedents and the ruin in the background is a free adaptation of the Merwede Tower near Dordrecht, one no longer has the sense that the setting is specific to the Netherlands. Cliffs, diffused in golden light, now border the inland waterway; clouds hang quietly over the land rather than being swept by winds off the North

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Sea; and the cowherd in the bright red jacket could just as well be Italian as Dutch. Indeed, in the interim between *River Landscape with Cows* and this picture, the influences of Cuyp's father and of Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656) have been fully replaced by that of artists who had returned from Italy and had adopted the Italianate style, particularly Jan Both (Dutch, 1615/1618 - 1652) and Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–1660/1661). From these artists Cuyp also derived his broad, planar technique as well as the elegant and artificial rhythms of the foreground vines and branches one sees here.

Although it seems probable that Cuyp executed *Herdsmen Tending Cattle* in the middle to late 1650s, establishing a precise date for this work is difficult given the dearth of dated paintings in his oeuvre. Many of the components of this work—the *contre-jour* light effects, the atmospheric character of the distant landscape, the abstract shapes of foreground rocks and lacy branches, and even the donkey and its saddle—are similar in character to *Horsemen and Herdsmen with Cattle*, a painting that probably dates from the same period. The comparison between the works, however, points out that the nuances of light, abstractions of form, and compositional organization are not as developed in *Herdsmen Tending Cattle* as in *Horsemen and Herdsmen with Cattle*, which suggests that this work was executed somewhat earlier, before Cuyp had fully mastered Italianate ideas.

Although *Herdsmen Tending Cattle* has been widely published and praised, its poor appearance prior to its restoration in 1994 when discolored varnish and extensive overpaint were removed, made it difficult to fully appreciate its original qualities. The painting has, nevertheless, suffered various losses, and the surface is moderately abraded [see Abrasion].[3] The work appears to have been slightly trimmed, which would account for the rather cramped quality of the composition. Its original appearance can perhaps be deduced from an old copy in the collection of Graham Baron Ash in Norfolk, England.[4] In addition to the Ash copy of the composition, a replica is owned by Dr. Wallace B. Shute of Ottawa.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

NOTES

[1] Lambert van den Bos, for example, the headmaster of a local school in

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Dordrecht, wrote a book entitled *Dordrechtsche Arcadia* in 1662.

[2] For Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp, see Sander Paarlberg, ed., *Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–1652)* (Dordrecht, 2002).

[3] A large paint loss and a long horizontal tear are present in the upper left sky. The ground is of medium thickness, is pigmented, and has a cool, pale ocher color. Cuyp modified the paint, applied in thin layers with no appreciable texture or impasto, with transparent and translucent glazes and thin opaque scumbles [see Scumbling]. Aside from the loss around the tear, scattered small losses occur in the distant landscape, along the edges, and in a vertical band through the cows. Moderate abrasion is present overall, particularly in the clouds and dark areas in the foreground and cows.

[4] See the 1995 archived version of the catalog, p. 46, fig. 1.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original, plain-woven, medium-weight fabric support has been lined. Tacking margins have been removed, and the remaining paint edges are worn. Cusping is slight on all sides but particularly along the left edge, suggesting that the painting's dimensions may have been slightly reduced along that side.[1] A large paint loss and a long horizontal tear are present in the upper left sky. The ground is of medium thickness, is pigmented, and has a cool, pale ocher color.

The paint, applied in thin layers with no appreciable texture or impasto, is modified with transparent and translucent glazes and thin opaque scumbles. Aside from the loss around the tear, scattered small losses occur in the distant landscape, along the edges, and in a vertical band through the cows. Moderate abrasion is present overall, particularly in the clouds and dark areas in the foreground and cows.

Conservation was carried out in 1958 to adjust inpainting in the sky and in 1978 to consolidate minor local flaking. A complete treatment was undertaken in 1994 in which old inpaint and discolored varnish were removed.[2]

[1] If the painting was reduced in size, the reduction took place prior to 1760. This is the date on a reproductive engraving by Francois Vivares, which shows the identical composition in reverse, except for a pair of birds.

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[2]During this treatment the NGA Scientific Research department analyzed the blue pigment used in the sky using polarized light microscopy and found it to be smalt (see report dated February 17, 1994, in NGA Conservation department files).

PROVENANCE

Possibly Gerard Vandergucht [1696-1776], London, c. 1750; possibly (his sale, London, 1757, no. 66); Jennens,[1] possibly for Henry Penton [d. 1806], London;[2] (his sale, Skinner & Dyke, London, 10 June 1800, no. 49); Sir Henry Paulet St. John-Mildmay, 3rd bt. [1764-1808], Dogmersfield House, Hampshire; by inheritance to his wife, Lady Jane St. John-Mildmay [c. 1765-1857], Dogmersfield House; by inheritance to her grandson, Sir Henry Bouverie Paulet St. John-Mildmay, 5th bt. [1810-1902], Dogmersfield House; by inheritance to his son, Sir Henry Paulet St. John-Mildmay, 6th bt. [1853-1916], Dogmersfield House; (M. Knoedler & Co., New York), from 1902; sold April 1905 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] The only source to mention Vandergucht (also written van der Gucht) is the Knoedler prospectus for the painting, in NGA curatorial files, which mistakenly lists the Vandergucht sale of 1777 that did not include any paintings by Cuyp. See instead Frank Simpson, “Dutch Paintings in England before 1760,” *The Burlington Magazine* 95 (January 1953): 41, who lists a "Landscape with Cattle, etc." by Cuyp as being no. 66 in a 1757 Vandergucht sale in London, where it was bought by “Jennens.” The listing appears in one of two manuscript volumes in the Victoria and Albert Museum library, London, that contain transcripts of catalogues of the principal collections of paintings sold in England between 1711 and 1759. Jennens was likely Charles Jennens, whom Simpson describes as having brought together by the mid-eighteenth century the largest collection of Dutch paintings then in England. Without further description or size information in the transcription, however, it is not possible to know whether the painting in question is identical to *Herdsmen Tending Cattle*.

[2] The Knoedler prospectus, in NGA curatorial files, says that Penton acquired the painting at the Vandergucht sale. Penton certainly owned the picture by 1760, the

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date on François Vivares' reproductive engraving, entitled *The Evening*. It depicts the composition in reverse but, with the exception of a group of two birds, it is otherwise identical. This print is listed in Charles LeBlanc, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes*, 4 vols., Paris, 1854: 4:141, no. 20; and Andreas Andresen, *Handbuch für Kupferstichsammler...*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1873: 2:678, no. 17.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1866 British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1866, no. 43.

1883 Works by Old Masters and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1883, no. 243.

1894 Loan Collection of Pictures, Art Gallery of the Corporation of London, Guildhall, London, 1894, no. 51.

1903 Exhibition of a Selection of Works by Early and Modern Painters of the Dutch School, Art Gallery of the Corporation of London, Guildhall, London, 1903, no. 176.

1925 Paintings by Old Masters from Pittsburgh Collections, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1925, no. 10.

2005 Time and Transformation in Dutch Seventeenth Century Art, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie; The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota; The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, 2005-2006, no. 13, repro.

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1942 *Book of Illustrations*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1942: 240, repro. 23.

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