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

Aelbert Cuyp
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

River Landscape with Cows

1645/1650

oil on panel
overall: 68 x 90.2 cm (26 3/4 x 35 1/2 in.)
framed: 91.1 x 112.7 x 5.1 cm (35 7/8 x 44 3/8 x 2 in.)
Inscription: lower right: A:Cuijp
Gift of Family Petschek (Aussig) 1986.70.1

ENTRY

Near the water's edge of an inland waterway, eight cows quietly chew their cud in the gentle winds of a late afternoon in summer. In the distance, a few sailboats glide along the river, their reflections shimmering in the peaceful water. On the crest of the gentle rise to the right, two herdsmen converse with a rider mounted on a large brown horse. Shafts of light breaking through the billowing clouds not only accentuate the figures' diminutive forms but also seem to provide a spiritual blessing upon their presence. The overriding sense is that this is a blessed land—fertile, prosperous, and at peace.

To the seventeenth-century Dutch, the well-fed cow was more than just a symbol of the nation's prosperity. Milk, butter, and cheese were important components of the Dutch diet, and succulent Dutch cheese was a major export product. Cuyp was not the first Dutch artist to focus on a herd of cows for his subject matter, but in his hands the theme took on a grandeur and dignity lacking in the work of his predecessors.[1] Whether in the hilly, dense forest landscapes of Roelandt Savery (Dutch, 1576 - 1639) or the flatter fields of scenes by Herman Saftleven (Dutch, c. 1609 - 1685), cows were portrayed as inelegant, graceless animals that mill

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together in rather haphazard formations. Cuyp, however, seems to have perceived a certain nobility in the beast, one he emphasized by placing the viewer at a low vantage point and by silhouetting the cattle against a light-filled background. He simplified and purified their forms to give their heads sharp, angular shapes. He further emphasized these ennobled profiles by orienting his herd on a horizontal axis along which their overlapping forms become visually connected. Finally, he projected their heads forward, even those lying in the grass, in a way that suggests a degree of alertness and even intelligence not normally associated with this species.

This painting is one of several similar images that Cuyp painted in the late 1640s and early 1650s; another example is *Landscape with Cows* [fig. 1]. In each of these works the viewpoint is low so that the animals take on added grandeur. The compositions are also linked by the way in which the herd is placed in the immediate foreground, along the bank of an inland waterway, and by the dramatic cloud formations that activate the sky. The stylistic evolution that led Cuyp to this imposing vision of pastoral life is complex. His picturesque scenes of rural life from the late 1630s and early 1640s belong to a tradition first introduced to Dutch art by Abraham Bloemaert (Dutch, 1566 - 1651), and developed by, among others, his pupil Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–1652), Aelbert Cuyp's father. By the early 1640s, however, Aelbert began to move away from this style and developed a tonal approach to landscape under the influence of Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656). His compositions, painted largely in yellow ochers, became simpler as he eliminated many picturesque elements from his scenes. Van Goyen's interest in vigorous cloud formations, evident in his river landscapes from the late 1640s, also seems to have awakened Cuyp to the possibilities of incorporating such skies in his works. In *River Landscape with Cows*, Van Goyen's influence can be seen in the way Cuyp's free and energetic brushwork in the clouds creates effects that capture the varied atmospheric conditions of a Dutch midsummer day.

By the late 1640s, however, Cuyp also began to incorporate stylistic elements into his paintings that derive from the Dutch Italianate artists who were then returning to the Netherlands, among them Jan Both (Dutch, 1615/1618 - 1652), Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–1660/1661), and Jan Asselijn (Dutch, c. 1610 - 1652). Although Cuyp's interest in depicting rural Dutch scenes remained essentially the same as in this work, he began to dramatize his images by portraying large foreground forms, particularly cattle, within a generalized, arcadian landscape.[2]

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Like other Dutch landscape artists, Cuyp based his painted scenes on two basic types of drawings made from life: extensive landscape drawings and studies of single figures and animals. One of his animal studies, that of a horse seen from behind, may have been the source for the horse on the crest of the hill [fig. 2]. Although a number of Cuyp's studies of cows resemble the animals in this painting, no known drawing served as a direct prototype for any of them.

Although this painting's provenance prior to 1917 is not known, its recent history is remarkable. In 1938, on the eve of World War II, the four sons of Jewish industrialist Ignaz Petschek decided to flee their homes in Aussig, Czechoslovakia, in advance of the impending German invasion of their homeland. To express his contempt for the Nazis, Franz Petschek, who had inherited the Cuyp painting, had a copy made of it, which he left hanging on the wall of his home. The copyist also painted a temporary watercolor landscape over the *River Landscape with Cows*, which Petschek took with him on his family's flight through Switzerland, France, and Spain. After crossing the Atlantic to Brazil aboard a freighter, the family finally arrived in New York City in 1940. Following the deaths of their father, Frank (Americanized from Franz), in 1963 and of their mother, Janina, in 1986, Elisabeth de Picciotto and Maria Petschek Smith donated Cuyp's painting to the National Gallery of Art to express the family's gratitude to the United States of America for the safe haven it gave to refugees, and for the freedom and opportunities it has afforded to so many throughout history.[3]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Aelbert Cuyp, *Landscape with Cows*, oil on panel, Collection of Ilone and George Kremer, Netherlands

fig. 2 Albert Cuyp, *Two Studies of a Lean Horse and a Study of a Dog*, c. 1647-1650, black chalk on cream antique laid paper, Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Museum, Loan from Maida and George Abrams, Boston Massachusetts, TL37360.13. Photo: Imaging Department ©President and Fellows of Harvard College

NOTES

[1] Joaneath Spicer, "'*De Koe voor d'aerde statt*': The Origin of the Dutch Cattle Piece," in *Essays in Northern European Art Presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Bergmann on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Anne-Marie Logan (Doornsijk, 1983), 251–256.

[2] Cuyp's compositional organization, in which a large diagonal form fills the lower right quadrant, is characteristic of the so-called single-wing composition so prevalent in Dutch landscapes from the period. For a full discussion of the changes in the compositional structure of Dutch landscapes, see Wolfgang Stechow, *Dutch Landscape Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, Studies in the History of European Art, no. 1 (Washington, DC, 1966), 38–40, 50–64. For a comparable work, see Stephen Reiss, *Aelbert Cuyp* (Boston, 1975), 76; and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichenis der Werke der herorragensten holländischen Maler des XVII, Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928), 2:1909.

[3] I would like to thank Maria Smith and Elisabeth de Picciotto for the information they provided to me about their family history.

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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a cradled wood panel composed of three, slightly warped, oak boards joined horizontally. [1] The horizontal grain is prominently visible through the extremely thin, off-white ground layer and paint. Paint is applied in thin opaque layers worked both wet-into-wet and wet-over-dry. Small elements, such as the boats, are painted over landscape and sky, while reserves were left for larger elements, such as the cows. Parallel strokes from a dry brush pulled through drying paint give texture to areas such as the distant landscape, while the sky is vigorously brushmarked.

Small losses are found along the edges, the lower panel join, and the foreground, where a caustic liquid dripped on the surface. Dark passages are moderately abraded. In 1987 discolored varnish and retouching were removed. In 2001 the painting underwent conservation treatment again to remove the varnish and inpainting applied in 1987, which had discolored.

[1] The wood was characterized as oak by visual examination.

PROVENANCE

Caroline Anne, 4th marchioness of Ely [1856-1917, née Caroline Anne Caithness], Eversley Park, Winchmore Hill, London; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 3 August 1917, no. 43); (C. Huggins, London);[1] sold 9 August 1917 to (Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd., London, and the dealer H.M. Clark); sold September 1919 to Gaston Neuman, Brussels.[2] (sale, Frederik Muller & Co., Amsterdam, 30 November–6 December 1920, 1st day, no. 1024, bought in); (Frederik Muller & Co., Amsterdam), until at least 1922;[3] possibly (Steinmeyer, Lucerne), in 1923;[4] (Paul Cassirer & Co., Berlin), by 1924.[5] Ignaz Petschek, Aussig, Czechoslovakia, by 1927; by inheritance to his son, Frank C. Petschek [d. 1963], Aussig, and New York;[6] by inheritance to his daughters, Elisabeth de Picciotto, New York, and Maria Petschek Smith, Falls Church, Virginia; gift 1986 to NGA.

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[1] Letter, 12 November 1952, Christie, Manson & Woods Ltd. to Frank Petschek, copy in NGA curatorial files.

[2] Many details of the provenance, in particular the specifics of Agnew's ownership and sale of the painting, were researched by Alan Chong, and provided to Arthur Wheelock in letters from 1988 and 1990 (some undated), in NGA curatorial files.

[3] Muller lent the painting to exhibitions in 1921 and 1922.

[4] Steinmeyer's possible ownership is cited in the files at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague; see their letter of 21 April 1951 to Frank Petschek, copy in NGA curatorial files.

[5] Cassirer lent the painting to a 1924 exhibition.

[6] The picture was removed from Czechoslovakia in, or shortly before, 1938 by Frank Petschek.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1921 Pintores holandeses dibujos, escultura, lithografia y arte aplicado, llevados por la cómision del consejo para las artes representativas de la comision holandesa en el extranjero, Madrid, 1921, no. 51.

1922 Udstilling af Aeldre og Nyere Hollandsk Malerkunst og Moderne Anvendt Kunst, Copenhagen, 1922, no. 30.

1924 Tentoonstelling van Werken door Dortsche Meesters, Pictura, Amsterdam, 1924, no. 10.

2001 Aelbert Cuyp, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, no. 19, repro.

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1975 Reiss, Stephen. *Aelbert Cuyp*. Boston, 1975: 206.

1987 Sutton, Peter C. *Masters of 17th-century Dutch landscape painting*. Exh. cat. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Philadelphia Museum of Art. Boston, 1987: 294.

1988 Chong, Alan. "In 't verbeelden van Slachtdieren.'" In *Meesterlijk vee--Nederlandse veeschilders, 1600-1900*. Edited by C. Boschma. Exh. cat. Dordrechts Museum; Fries Museum, Leeuwarden. Zwolle, 1988: 82, repro.

1992 Chong, Alan. "Aelbert Cuyp and the Meanings of Landscape." Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992: 362-363, no. 121.

1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 33-36, color repro. 35.

2001 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Aelbert Cuyp*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Washington, 2001: no. 19, 130-131, 195, repro.

2014 Bijl, Martin, and Wouter Kloek. "A Painting Re-Attributed to Aebert Cuyp: Connoisseurship and Technical Research." *The Burlington Magazine* 156, no. 1331 (February 2014): 91-98, figs. 20, 25, 26, 30, 32.

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Aelbert Cuyp/*River Landscape with Cows*/1645/1650,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/69390 (accessed December 21, 2016).

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