



Aert van der Neer
Dutch, 1603/1604 - 1677

Moonlit Landscape with Bridge

probably 1648/1650

oil on panel

overall: 78.4 x 110.2 cm (30 7/8 x 43 3/8 in.)

framed: 101.6 x 132.7 x 6.4 cm (40 x 52 1/4 x 2 1/2 in.)

Inscription: lower right in ligature: AvdN

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ENTRY

This evocative landscape, in which Aert van der Neer has captured the subtle atmospheric effects of the Dutch landscape illuminated by the glow of a moonlit sky, is one of the master's most compelling night scenes. The light of the full moon, somewhat diffused by the varied cloud formations that enliven the sky, is nevertheless intense enough to create strong reflections in the water of the slowly moving river that skirts the city and on the windows of buildings lining the shore. This light brings the gnarled tree trunks at the left to life and accents the uppermost leaves on the graceful trees that arch over the water. It reveals paths and bridges, picks out the family returning home over the stone bridge with their dog, and highlights the elegant couple standing in the shadows of the trees at the right.

In conceiving this image, Van der Neer was more interested in creating the mood of nature than in recording an actual setting. The large houses to the left are similar to those found in Amsterdam where the artist lived most of his life, but the church adjacent to the dwellings beyond recall those found in smaller cities and towns. The building complex in the background on the opposite shore of the river appears

to be the ruins of an ancient small castle or country house surrounded by a high wall of a type traditionally situated in more rural settings. [1] Likewise, the elegant couple on the right stands before a stone gate similar to those that served as entrances to country houses, particularly those situated along the river Vecht. The setting, thus, is a composite of various aspects of city and country life that Van der Neer has brought into a harmonious whole.

Although few of Van der Neer's paintings are dated, broad patterns within his stylistic development suggest that he executed this work near the end of the 1640s. It stands at the culmination of a period when his nocturnal scenes depicted the reflections of a full moon in the quiet waterways of the Dutch countryside. [2] This painting exhibits a number of remarkable techniques that Van der Neer developed to convey his atmospheric effects. He suggested the translucency of the clouds, for example, by allowing the reddish ochre *Imprimatura* covering the walnut panel to remain visible through thinly applied bluish gray paint. In the foreground, he articulated a number of objects with light contours, sometimes highlighted with paint applied with a brush and sometimes by scratching the wet paint with an instrument to reveal the Ground layer. [3]

Interest in moonlit landscapes in the Netherlands can be traced to engravings made by Hendrik Goudt (Dutch, 1585 - 1648) after paintings by Adam Elsheimer (German, 1578 - 1610) in the second decade of the seventeenth century. One of the few Dutch painters to venture into this new domain was Rafael Govertsz Camphuysen (1597/1598–1657), with whom Van der Neer may well have studied in Gorinchem during the 1620s. [4] That Camphuysen's early influence encouraged Van der Neer to develop this genre of painting after he moved to Amsterdam in the early 1630s seems unlikely, but virtually nothing is known of Van der Neer's artistic contacts during the 1630s and 1640s except that Camphuysen was a witness at the baptism of his daughter in Amsterdam in 1642. [5] Nevertheless, because Van der Neer's scenes appear to be based on excursions he made in and around Amsterdam, it seems that he developed his style rather independently. Only Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640) explored the transformation of a landscape through light as profoundly as did Van der Neer. If Van der Neer was in fact familiar with Rubens' landscapes from the 1630s, either firsthand or through the prints of engravers such as Schelte Adams Bolswert (Flemish, 1586 - 1659), he succeeded in adapting the Flemish master's atmospheric effects to a Dutch landscape setting.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

NOTES

- [1] The edifice does not conform to any recognizable structure. Peter Sutton relates a similar structure in *Moonlit View on a River*, 1647, to the manor house *Kostverloren*, which stood along the river Amstel not far from Amsterdam (Peter C. Sutton et al., *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* [Boston, 1987], 381–383, no. 59). It is indeed possible that *Kostverloren* provided the inspiration for such castle-like forms in the background of some of Van der Neer's paintings from the late 1640s (see also *Moonlit Landscape with Castle*, 1646, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, inv. no. 3561-8-55), but if so, he has transformed its appearance so much as to make it unrecognizable.
- [2] This dating has been proposed by Fredo Bachmann, *Aert van der Neer* (Bremen, 1982), 68–73.
- [3] For a discussion of Van der Neer's painting techniques from this period see Manja Zeldenrust, "Aert van der Neer's Rivierlandschap bij maanlicht opgehelderd," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 31 (1983): 99–104.
- [4] For an illustration of one of Camphuysen's nocturnal scenes, which probably dates from the mid-1640s (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, no. 1546), see Walther Bernt, *Die niederländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts. 800 Künstler mit 1470 Abbildungen*, 3rd ed. (Munich, 1969), repro. 222.
- [5] For the relationship of Rafael and his brother Govert Dircksz Camphuysen (1623–1672) to the early work of Van der Neer, see Fredo Bachmann, "Die Brüder Rafel und Jochem Camphuysen und ihr Verhältnis zu Aert van der Neer," *Oud-Holland* 85 (1970): 243–250, and also Fredo Bachmann, "Die Herkunft der Frühwerke des Aert van der Neer," *Oud-Holland* 89 (1975): 213–222. The earliest known dated landscape by Van der Neer is 1635, executed after he had moved to Amsterdam.
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PROVENANCE

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Jacob Frederiksz van Beek, Amsterdam; (his sale, Jeronimo De Vries et al., Amsterdam, 2 June 1828, no. 49); Engelberts.[1] F. Tielens, Brussels. J. Walter, London.[2] Possibly August Thyssen [1842-1926]; his son, Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza [1875-1947], Schloss Rohoncz, Hungary, Amsterdam, and Villa Favorita, Lugano, by at least 1930; by inheritance to his daughter, Gabrielle Thyssen-Bornemisza [1915 or 1917-1999] and her husband, Baron Adolphe Bentinck van Schoonheten [1905-1970], Paris and London.[3] (Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna), by 1989; purchased 29 January 1990 by NGA.

[1] Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, 8 vols., trans. Edward G. Hawke, London, 1907-1927: 7:406, states that "Engelberts" purchased the picture for 200 florins. An annotated copy of the sale catalogue in the Frick Art Reference Library, New York, records the same information (copy in NGA curatorial files).

[2] The names of Tielens and Walter were provided by the Galerie Sanct Lucas.

[3] According to the Galerie Sanct Lucas, the picture had been in the Thyssen family for three generations before its sale; the Galerie included Baron Bentinck's name in the provenance. Ownership by Thyssen-Bornemisza is also given in Wolfgang Schultz, *Aert van der Neer*, Doornspijk, 2002: no. 528. Although August Thyssen did collect art in his later years, the main Thyssen-Bornemisza collection was formed by his son, Heinrich, at whose death the collection was divided among his four children. The Dutch diplomat Baron Bentinck van Schoonheten married Gabrielle Thyssen-Bornemisza in 1938. The painting was exhibited in Munich in 1930 in an exhibition of works from Schloss Rohoncz, and the painting was on loan as part of the Bentinck-Thyssen collection to the Gemäldegalerie of the Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf from 1974 until August 1984 (e-mails of 18 and 23 May 2012, in NGA curatorial files).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1930 Sammlung Schloss Rohoncz, Neue Pinakothek, Munich, 1930, no. 238.

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1964 Aus der Sammlung Schloss Rohoncz, Kunstmuseum, Bern, 1964, no. 23.

1974 Loan to display with permanent collection, Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf, 1974-1984.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a single piece of thin, horizontally grained walnut cut across the entire tree trunk width.[1] All sides of the back are beveled, and the panel is slightly bowed. The wood grain is plainly visible through the smooth, extremely thin white ground. The thick fawn-colored imprimatura is incorporated as a mid-tone in the foreground and sky.

The paint was applied in thin layers. Brushwork is prominent in the sky, and stippling was employed in the foliage and lawn. Highlights were sometimes created by the application of light-colored paint, and sometimes by scratching into the dark paint to reveal the lighter imprimatura below. Slight cupping has formed along the wood grain. Judiciously applied inpainting covers scattered small losses and local abrasions. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

[1] Wood analysis was performed by the NGA Scientific Research department (see report dated February 25, 1992, in NGA Conservation files).

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