



Aelbert Cuyp
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

Landscape with Herdsmen

mid-1650s

oil on panel

overall: 47.7 × 81.5 cm (18 3/4 × 32 1/16 in.)

framed: 76.84 × 110.81 × 12.7 cm (30 1/4 × 43 5/8 × 5 in.)

Inscription: lower right: A. cuyp. .

Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection) 2014.79.707

ENTRY

In this beautifully preserved, luminous work two horsemen have stopped on a small rise overlooking a broad river valley to ask local herdsman for directions. The moment is one of little narrative significance, yet the low vantage point and the quiet dignity of the figures and cattle silhouetted against the blue sky give the scene a monumental grandeur far greater than the painting's modest scale might seem to warrant. The golden light of the late afternoon sun further enhances the pastoral mood as it softens the landscape in the distance and casts a quiet, peaceful spell over the scene, a veritable Dutch Arcadia.[1]

This evocative landscape is one of several similarly serene scenes depicting herdsman tending cattle that Cuyp painted in the late 1640s and early 1650s, shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Münster in 1648 that ended the Dutch Revolt. This bucolic image conveys the aura of peace and pastoral well-being that must have been strongly felt after the 80 years of struggle leading to the formation of the Dutch Republic. Dairy cows, whose creamy milk yielded the cheeses and butter that were important to the Dutch economy, represented the wholesome prosperity of the Dutch nation, and this concept may underlie the significance Cuyp

has given to the herd in this work.[2] Cuyp emphasized the animals' dignity by orienting the group on a horizontal axis along which their overlapping forms become visually connected. The two cows at the left, with their distinctively noble profiles, gaze out over the landscape, almost as guardians of the peaceful and verdant river valley stretching beyond them. Although Cuyp emphasized these pictorial qualities in this carefully considered composition, they are already evident in the chalk drawings of cows that he made in anticipation of paintings such as this [fig. 1].[3] These drawings, sometimes with small variations, must have served as models for Cuyp's paintings. Here, for example, the resting cow gazing off to the left is also found in Cuyp's *Peasants and Cattle by the River Merwede*, datable to the late 1650s [fig. 2]. [4]

Cuyp's paintings of the early 1640s are often tonal landscapes of the Dutch countryside similar to those made by Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656). Around 1650, however, he began to create landscapes that reflect the influence of Dutch Italianate artists, among them Jan Both (Dutch, 1615/1618 - 1652), Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), and Jan Asselijn (Dutch, c. 1610 - 1652), who were then returning to the Netherlands after prolonged stays in Italy. Cuyp adapted not only the golden light and *contre-jour* effects of the late afternoon sun that characterize their works, but also the gentle cloud formations that grace their skies. Following the Italianates' inspiration, he also began rendering distant landscapes in a broadly suggestive manner and started using large, somewhat abstractly rendered shrubs as *repoussoir* elements in his foregrounds. As a result, paintings such as this one often have a generalized pastoral character that defies localization.

The evolution in Cuyp's style is evident in a comparison of this painting of the mid-1650s with his *River Landscape with Cows* from the late 1640s [fig. 3]. Although both paintings portray a realm where man, animal, and nature coexist in peaceful harmony, the impact of the two works is strikingly different. The emphasis of the earlier work is on the dramatic sky, with shafts of light breaking through billowing clouds. In this later painting Cuyp has emphasized the quiet stillness of the air warmed by the sun—an effect he has reinforced by silhouetting the cattle prominently against the golden sky and by using muted tones in the distant river valley. The single puffy cloud formation that floats above the land is more decorative than real, a characteristic that becomes quite pronounced in his Arcadian images of the mid-1650s.[5]

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Despite the evocative quality of *Landscape with Herdsmen*, the setting is based on a real place: the valley of the Rhine River near the towns of Cleves and Calcar, not far from the Dutch border. In the early 1640s, when Cuyp first visited this broad river valley dotted with towns, churches, and windmills, he recorded his impressions in a series of large panoramic drawings that were once part of a sketchbook. Years later, when Cuyp painted *Landscape with Herdsmen*, he referred to one of these drawings: a view of Calcar with Monterberg, a hill on which stood the ruins of the castle of the dukes of Cleves, rising in the distance [fig. 4]. Nevertheless, atmosphere, not topography, was Cuyp's primary concern in this luminous painting, for Monterberg almost disappears from view beyond the gentle haze emanating from the river valley. The quiet, reflective quality of this scene captures the essence of Cuyp's ideals of the Dutch Arcadia, an approach to landscape that characterizes the artist's work throughout the rest of his career.[6]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

June 30, 2017

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

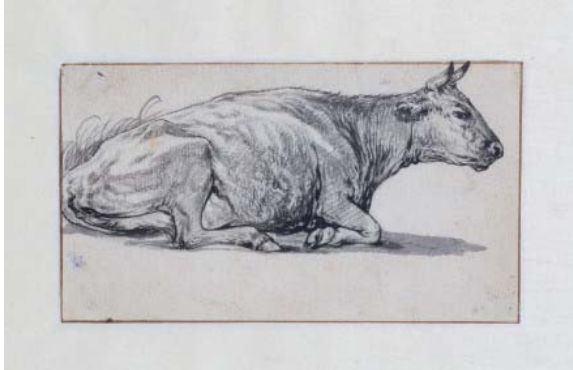


fig. 1 Aelbert Cuyp, *A Cow Lying Down*, early 1650s, black chalk, gray wash, Private Collection, The Netherlands



fig. 2 Aelbert Cuyp, *Peasants and Cattle by the River Merwede*, c. 1658-1660, oil on panel, National Gallery, London, Bequeathed by John Staniforth Beckett, 1889, NG1289. © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY



fig. 3 Aelbert Cuyp, *River Landscape with Cows*, 1645/1650, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Family Petschek (Aussig), 1986.70.1



fig. 4 Aelbert Cuyp, *View of Calcar on the Lower Rhine near Cleve*, early 1640s, black chalk, grey wash and watercolor, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, From the Collection of Rita and Frits Markus, Bequest of Rita Markus, 2005, 2005.330.4

NOTES

- [1] For a discussion of Aelbert Cuyp and the Dutch Arcadia, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Aelbert Cuyp and the Depiction of the Dutch Arcadia,” in *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), 15–33.
- [2] Joaneath Spicer, “‘De Koe voor d’aede staat’: The Origin of the Dutch Cattle Piece,” in *Essays in Northern European Art Presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Anne-Marie Logan (Doornspijk, 1983), 251–256. For the symbolism of the cow in Dutch art, see: Alan Chong, “In ‘t verbeelden van Slachtdieren,” in *Meesterlijk Vee: Nederlandse veeschilders, 1600–1700*, ed. C. Boschma (Zwolle, 1988), 56–86.
- [3] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), 271, no. 103.
- [4] This observation was made by Sjraar van Heugten, “Grazende modellen: Aspecten van het Nederlandse veestuk,” in *Meesterlijk Vee: Nederlandse veeschilders, 1600–1700*, ed. C. Boschma (Zwolle, 1988), 23.
- [5] Although this author dated this painting c. 1650–1652 in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), 142, no. 25, the exhibition revealed that a later date was more appropriate.
- [6] For copies after this work, see Alan Chong, “Aelbert Cuyp and the Meaning of Landscape” (PhD diss., New York University, 1992), 373–375, no. 133. See also: sale, Christie, Manson & Woods Ltd., London, July 12, 1985, no. 106.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a horizontally grained oak (est.) panel with the top, bottom, and right edges of the panel beveled on the reverse. In a past treatment by Stephen Pichetto, a cradle was adhered to the reverse after applying fill material and wooden inserts to compensate for the bevels. It is likely that the reverse was slightly thinned prior to the application of the cradle.

The support was prepared with a double ground, with the bottommost layer off-white in color and the top layer tan. The paint is fairly smooth, with only low impasto in the details of the foliage in the foreground. The sky was painted in first, leaving reserves for the figures and animals, which were likely blocked in with black paint, evidenced by the dark shapes visible in the X-radiograph. The paint was applied in stages, wet-over-dry, though some areas such as the landscape and foreground were painted wet-into-wet, overlapping the drier paint of the sky and animals below.

The paint layers are in good condition and the panel is structurally sound. There are a few old damages to the panel, including two horizontal cracks that start at the center of the left edge and extend into the sky, as well as a minor crack in the lower right corner. No instability in the panel is associated with these damages. Overall there are minor scattered losses, most of which have been retouched. The two resting cows and the areas of landscape exhibit a fine craquelure pattern that has associated minor losses.

PROVENANCE

Probably (sale, by J. A. Jolles and H. de Winter, Amsterdam, 23 May 1764, no. 41, bought in). C. Price, London; Frederick Howard, 5th earl of Carlisle [1748-1825], London, and Castle Howard, Yorkshire, by 1771;^[1] by descent in the Howard family to George James Howard, 9th earl of Carlisle [1843-1911], London and Castle Howard; purchased September 1907 by (P. & D. Colnaghi, London), half share with (M. Knoedler & Co., London and New York);^[2] sold July 1909 to William Andrews Clark [1839-1925], New York; bequest 1926 to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; acquired 2014 by the National Gallery of Art.

[1] According to Alan Chong (“Aelbert Cuyt and the Meaning of Landscape,” Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992: 374, 375 n. 1), the painting was sold by Price to Howard in 1771 or shortly before. This information comes from an 1865 inventory in the Castle Howard archives of the Earl of Carlisle’s house on Grosvenor Place in London, in which the painting is listed as number 92. The earl in 1865 would have been the Reverend William George Howard, 8th earl of Carlisle (1808-1889), who succeeded to the title in December of the previous year.

[2] The painting is stock number 11463 in the M. Knoedler & Co. Records, accession number 2012.M.54, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Painting Stockbook 5, 8800-12652, 1899 April - 1911 December, page 149 of the stockbook; copy in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1815 Probably Pictures by Rubens, Rembrandt, VanDyke, and other Artists of the Flemish and Dutch Schools, British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1815, no. 57.[1]

1822 Probably Pictures of the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Schools, British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1822, no. 136 or no. 138.

1828 Probably Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Masters, British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1828, no. 83.

1853 Probably Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, French and English Masters, British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1853, no. 7.

1861 Possibly Royal Dublin Society, 1861, no. 61, as Cattle Piece.[2]

1959 Loan Exhibition. Masterpieces of the Corcoran Gallery of Art: A Benefit Exhibition in Honor of the Gallery's Centenary, Wildenstein, New York, 1959, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1978 The William A. Clark Collection: An exhibition marking the 50th Anniversary of the installation of The Clark Collection at The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, no catalogue.

2001 Aelbert Cuyp, National Gallery of Art, Washington; The National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, no. 25, repro.


EXHIBITION HISTORY NOTES

[1] The early exhibition history references are all tentative, as the Earl of Carlisle owned six paintings attributed to Cuyp, several depicting cattle and horsemen, and the exhibition catalogues provide no detailed descriptions or size information.

[2] Lent by George William Frederick Howard, 7th earl of Carlisle (1802-1864), this painting could be the NGA painting; see Alan Chong, "Aelbert Cuyp and the Meaning of Landscape," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992: 375 n. 2.

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- 1955 Breckenridge, James D. *A handbook of Dutch and Flemish paintings in the William Andrews Clark collection*. Washington, 1955: 11, repro.
- 1959 Corcoran Gallery of Art. *Masterpieces of the Corcoran Gallery of Art*. Washington, D.C., 1959: 14, repro.
- 1967 Dattenberg, Heinrich. *Niederrheinansichten holländischer Künstler des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Die Kunstdenkmäler des Rheinlands 10. Düsseldorf, 1967: 74, no. 82.
- 1975 Reiss, Stephen. *Aelbert Cuyp*. Boston, 1975: 126, no. 89, repro.
- 1986 Sutton, Peter C. *A Guide to Dutch Art in America*. Washington and Grand Rapids, 1986: 299, fig. 451.
- 1988 Heugten, Siraar van. "Grazende modellen: Aspecten van het Nederlandse veestuk." In *Meesterlijk Vee: Nederlandse Veeschilders 1600–1900*. Edited by C. Boschma. Exh. cat. Dordrechts Museum; Fries Museum, Leeuwarden. Zwolle, 1988: 23-24, repro.

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