



Aelbert Cuyp
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

Lady and Gentleman on Horseback

c. 1655, reworked 1660/1665

oil on canvas

overall: 123 x 172 cm (48 7/16 x 67 11/16 in.)

framed: 164.8 x 214 x 16.2 cm (64 7/8 x 84 1/4 x 6 3/8 in.)

Inscription: lower left: A.Cuijp.

Widener Collection 1942.9.15

ENTRY

Although the hunt became a popular pastime for Dutch patricians in the second half of the seventeenth century and numerous representations of the sport exist, Cuyp was the only Dutch artist to create large-scale formal portraits of aristocrats engaged in this activity. *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*, which is the largest and most imposing of these works, is unique in that it represents an elegant equestrian couple, probably a husband and wife, setting out for the hunt. With an expansive light-filled arcadian landscape stretching behind them, they embark with two types of hounds: tufters to track the deer and follow the scent and greyhounds (under the control of an attendant) to run after the deer and bring them to bay.[1]

The names of the sitters are not known with certainty.[2] Nevertheless, a promising clue to their identity is a bust-length portrait, based on the male rider in this painting, which has been traditionally identified as Adriaen Stevensz Snouck (c. 1634–1671).[3] Alan Chong, who discovered the resemblance between the two heads, has noted that Snouck, originally from Rotterdam, lived in The Hague until his marriage to Erkenraad Berk Matthisdr (1638–1712) in 1654. This marriage would have brought Snouck into contact with Cuyp since Erkenraad was the daughter of Matthijs Berk, Raad-Pensionaris of Dordrecht and an important patron of the artist. This theory may well account for the prominence given to the female sitter, who, resplendent in her gorgeous blue dress, is mounted on a white horse with a brilliant red and gold saddlecloth.[4]

Chong's identification of the sitters accords well with technical examinations of the painting. As is evident in the X-radiographs [see X-radiography] [fig. 1], Cuyp overpainted and changed major portions of *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*. The man originally wore a hat and had shorter hair, and his collar lay flat on his shoulders. He also wore a military-style tunic-and-cape combination, adorned with braids and buttons (presumably gold). This costume, the overall color of which was apparently a brilliant red rather than the current brown, was in many respects similar to that worn by Jan Six in Rembrandt's famous portrait of 1654, in the Six Collection, Amsterdam.

The woman's costume was also substantially changed. Her hat was a different shape and its feather sat farther back on her head; her dress fit more loosely and seems to have fallen over the right flank of her horse; and instead of her fairly low, elegantly gathered neckline, Cuyp originally had painted a plain flat collar that covered the woman's shoulders. The costume was comparable to that seen in Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670)'s 1654 portrait of Abraham del Court and Maria del Keerssegieter [fig. 2]. From the stylistic characteristics of the outfits in *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*, one can conclude that Cuyp painted the original version in about 1654–1655. As this probable period of execution coincides with the 1654 date of the marriage of Adriaen Snouck and Erkenraad Berk, it is possible that Cuyp received the initial commission to commemorate that event.

Aside from making changes in the figures' costumes, Cuyp also substantially modified the mood of the painting by altering the woman's pose and the arrangement of figures in the landscape. The woman originally assumed a less demure position, with her right arm extended, presumably to hold the reins tightly. This gesture would have given her a more active appearance than is evident in the final version. The background was also more dynamic. Instead of the two greyhounds and the young attendant walking behind the riders, Cuyp originally included five running greyhounds and a somewhat larger young man in red socks running with them.[5] The juxtaposition of the portraits and the background figures would thus have been similar to that seen in the painting of the Pompe van Meerdervoort family in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[6] Finally, the landscape also sloped in front from the left, and Cuyp may have made changes to the fanciful castlelike building at the far left.

Although no specific symbolism relating to marriage exists in the painting, the hunt as a theme was metaphorically linked with the game of love.[7] Also, the large burdock leaves in the foreground were frequently associated with love.[8] Cuyp

had a special fondness for this plant and included it in the foreground of a number of his paintings.[9] In most of these works the symbolic associations of the burdock leaf seem irrelevant to the meaning of the painting, but in this instance, with the dog calling attention to the plant's presence, Cuyp may have intended to convey its symbolic associations.

The remarkable revisions in the painting suggest that the patrons were dissatisfied with the original composition. One may speculate that the activity of the hunt distracts from the formal character of the double portrait. The substantial modifications in costume, however, also indicate that the sitters wanted to update their image. For example, the male rider's dignified brown jacket crossed by a sash and his long, wavy hair worn falling over the shoulders only came into vogue in about 1660. Cuyp's patrons may also have desired a more refined style of portraiture than the artist had provided in his initial version. Indeed, these portraits are remarkably elegant for Cuyp, who is not noted for his nuanced modeling of the human form. Their style reflects that of Nicolaes Maes (Dutch, 1634 - 1693), who after returning to Dordrecht in the mid-1650s initiated a new fashion of portraiture in his native city patterned on the model of Sir Anthony van Dyck (Flemish, 1599 - 1641). Maes' Dordrecht portraits capture the elegant, aristocratic aspirations of a society that had begun to fashion itself after French styles of dress and decorum, and Cuyp clearly learned from this example.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 X-radiograph composite, Aelbert Cuyp, *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*, c. 1655, reworked 1660/1665, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.15



fig. 2 Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Abraham del Court and His Wife Maria de Kaersgieter*, 1654, oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photo: Studio Tromp, Rotterdam

NOTES

- [1] Ann P. Wagner, a graduate student at the University of Maryland, provided valuable information about the character of these hounds. For further information, see Anthony Dent, *Horses in Shakespeare's England* (London, 1987), 128.
- [2] Stephen Reiss, *Aelbert Cuyp* (Boston, 1975), 165, proposed that the gentleman was "a member of the Pompe [van Meerdervoort] family, perhaps Cornelis Pompe (1639–1680), the younger of the two boys seen in the New York picture" [referring to Cuyp's *Equestrian Portrait of Cornelis (1639–1680) and Michiel Pompe van Meerdervoort (1638–1653) with Their Tutor and Coachman ("Starting for the Hunt")*, early 1650s, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed, *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 29]; but this conclusion rests on the assumption that the star-shaped horse brass in the Washington picture, which resembles that in the New York picture, relates to the family crest. On the other hand, in a letter dated February 25, 1984 (NGA curatorial files), Alan Chong noted that the horse brass in the National Gallery's picture is similar to the stylized five-pointed oak leaf that appears in the Berk family crest. In fact, according to the archivist of the Municipal Archives in Dordrecht, these horse brasses were standard decorative elements of Turkish origin and cannot be connected with family crests. Indeed, exactly the same motifs occur on the horse brass in Paulus Potter's 1653 life-size equestrian portrait of Dirck Tulp, in the Six Collection, Amsterdam. The suggestion has also been made in a number of the Widener collection catalogs (see Bibliography) that the woman, because of her younger appearance, may be the man's daughter.
- [3] The painting is in the Zeeuws Genootschap van Kunst en Wetenschap,

Middelburg. Alan Chong kindly provided this information in a letter, February 5, 1990 (NGA curatorial files).

- [4] This identification, however, does not explain the two letters, *JH*, embroidered on the woman's saddlecloth. These initials have not yet been connected with any name.
- [5] The red socks can be seen through the somewhat translucent surface paint.
- [6] Another connection is the architecture of the building; though not identical, it is similar in character to that in the Washington painting. This structure is probably a fanciful evocation of an ancient fortified chateau such as Cuyp may have seen on his trip along the Rhine.
- [7] Eddy de Jongh noted: "The hunt is synonymous with the game of love and it . . . was a current and naturally obvious metaphor." Eddy de Jongh, "Erotica in *vogelperspectief: De dubbelzinnigheid van een reeks 17de eeuwse genrevoorstellingen*," *Simiolus* 3 (1968–1969): 34.
- [8] Although the burdock leaf can be a symbol of either virtue and fidelity or vice and lust, the context of the scene clearly points toward the first alternative. See Melinda B. Parsons and William M. Ramsay, "The Scarlet Letter and an Herbal Tradition," *Emerson Society Quarterly* 29 (4th Quarter, 1983): 197–207.
- [9] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 39.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support, a fairly coarse fabric, has been lined with the vertical tacking margins trimmed. Cusping is visible along all edges. Both the top and bottom tacking margins have been unfolded and incorporated into the picture plane. The painting is generally in good condition, although tears are found near the top edge, left of center, and the right edge, near the lower right corner. The canvas was prepared with a double ground: an orange-red lower layer covered by a gray upper layer.

Paint is applied in thin opaque layers. Numerous artist's changes are visible as pentimenti and with infrared reflectography at 1.2 to 5 microns [1] and X-radiography. The man had shorter hair and wore a brimmed hat, a decorated tunic, and an embroidered cape tied under his plain collar. The woman, whose proper right arm was raised to hold the reins, wore a large brimmed hat pushed back on her head, a cape, and an ornate dress that fell over the horse's right side. The

white horse's decorated martingale was slung lower. The boy in the middleground was running, accompanied by five greyhounds. Contour changes were made in the seated rider at the far left and in the lower left landscape.

The lining canvas was in place when the painting was treated privately in 1942, and records indicate at least two generations of inpainting were present. Prior to acquisition, discolored varnish and earlier inpainting were removed, and a surface coating of varnish applied. The painting was treated in 1998–1999, at which time the 1942 varnish and inpainting, which had discolored, were removed. During that treatment it was determined that faded yellow lake glazes probably caused discoloration of the leaves in the lower left and smalt degradation probably caused discoloration of the man's jacket.[2]

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Kodak 310-21X Focal plane array PtSi camera.

[2] Cross-sections of the painting were analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using light microscopy as well as scanning electron microscopy in conjunction with energy-dispersive spectrometry (see report dated June 6, 1998, in NGA Conservation department files).

PROVENANCE

(Thomas Emmerson [c. 1776- 1855], London) before 1834.[1] purchased through Henry Artaria by Edmund Higginson [1802-1871], Saltmarshe Castle, near Bromyard, Herefordshire, before 1842;[2] (his sale, Christie & Manson, London, 4 June 1846, no. 212, as *The Departure for the Chase*, bought in); (his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 16 June 1860, no. 34, as *The Departure for the Chase*); (Charles J. Nieuwenhuys, Brussels and London). Adrian John Hope [1811-1863], London; (his estate sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 30 June 1894, no. 22, as *Grand Landscape*); (Charles J. Wertheimer, London). (Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris); sold 1894 to Peter A.B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania;[3] inheritance from Estate of Peter A.B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] John Smith describes the painting as “formerly in the possession of Thomas Emmerson, Esq.” (John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols., London, 1829–1842: 5[1834]: no. 177). Emmerson was apparently a dealer and collector, and the first auction of paintings in which he was the only seller took place in London in 1829. There were several other sales of paintings in his possession, from the 1830s through the 1850s, but the Gallery’s painting has not been found in any of the catalogues.

[2] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols., London, 1829–1842: 9(1842):664.

[3] Widener Collection records, in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

2001 Aelbert Cuyp, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, no. 40, repro.

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