

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Adriaen Van de Velde (1636 - 1672)

A Herdsman and Cattle at a Stream

oil on canvas, laid down on panel, 12¼ x 16⅜ in. (32 x 41.5 cm.)

indistinctly signed lower right.

The younger brother of the great marine painter Willem Van de Velde the Younger, Adriaen Van de Velde was the subject of a major exhibition held at Dulwich and at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in 2016 and 2017. The show and accompanying monograph (see Literature) not only revived general appreciation of this extraordinarily versatile artist but also reminded connoisseurs of Dutch art of Adriaen's exalted stature among collectors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with bucolic idylls such as this one being among his most coveted subjects. Painting in early modern Europe was often a family business, particularly in the Low Countries, and so Adriaen, who was according to his earliest biographer Houbraken 'impelled by an inherited natural passion for the arts of drawing and painting', grew up in the flourishing Van de Velde studio in Amsterdam. It seems, however, that the endless canvas, cordage and canons of his father's and brother's ships may not have been to this gifted young man's taste, and a spell working in Haarlem in the 1650s with a master of Dutch Italianate landscape painting, Jan Wijnants, seems to have determined his future direction. Over the next twenty years or so he produced an extensive body of paintings, drawings and prints of sunlit views with herdsmen and cattle, beaches, dunes, forests, winter scenes, portraits in landscapes and historical pictures. Moreover, a handful of religious subjects, most notably his large Annunciation of 1667 (Rijksmuseum), attests to a further break with his upbringing and his leaning towards the Roman Catholic faith. In 1657 he married Maria van Ouderkerk, herself a Catholic, and managed to have all five of their children baptised as Catholics in resolutely protestant Amsterdam. Adriaen not only fell under the influence of the great Jacob Ruisdael but also added the figures, or 'staffage', in a handful of his pictures, while Paulus Potter seems to have set the example for Van de Velde's forest scenes, his sensitive and detailed rendering of animals and the sharp, clear light of his pictures from the 1650s.

Our resting shepherd epitomises the rather dreamy, tranquil Italianate landscapes to which the artist turned in the 1660s, and of which a celebrated example is to be found in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum (*Landscape with Cattle and Figures*, 1664). As is well-documented in Van de Velde's oeuvre, there exist preparatory drawings for many of the figures – both human and animal – in his oil paintings, and in ours the boy cooling his feet in the shady pool is a motif known from a fine chalk drawing in the Amsterdam Museum (*Two studies of a seated young man*). The whole scene is suffused with a feeling of peace and repose, with the sheep and cows appearing to be appreciating the respite as much as the herdsman himself. Only the exquisitely drawn goat appears to take notice of us, staring alertly at the viewer.

The Cook collection of Old Masters was a particularly notable one, and, until 1958, included the much-publicized Leonardo da Vinci painting of *Salvator Mundi* sold at auction in 2017

Exhibitions

Sheffield, Graves Art Gallery, March – April 1956, *Dutch Masterpieces*, no. 53

Literature:

Hofstede de Groot, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. IV, no. 129;

Bart Cornelis & Marijn Schapelhoutman, *Adriaen Van de Velde – Dutch Master of Landscape* (London 2016), p.154 & fig. 151 as 'Present whereabouts unknown.'