



GALLERY  
NOTES®

*from*

JOHN MITCHELL  
FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

FEBRUARY 2019



*Sparrowhawk*

## JOHANNES BRONKHORST (1648-1727)

*Assorted European birds: crossbill, lesser-spotted woodpecker, hawfinch, nightingale, ring ouzel, treecreeper, pipit and sparrowhawk*

bodycolour on card, each 8 ½ x 10 ½ in. (21.5 x 26.5 cm.) – eight (8)  
all signed and (some indistinctly) inscribed 'Ad. Vivum', and some variously  
dated 1723, 1724 and 1726

### **Provenance:**

England since the 18th century;  
the Gerard Leigh family, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, until 1903;  
thence by descent.

Front: *Hawfinch*



Pen & wash portrait of Bronkhorst, after N. Verkolje. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Bronkhorst is one of those Dutch Old Masters about whom virtually nothing is known, save for a single, rather charming fact about some other, unrelated activity. Just as it is recorded that his famous near-contemporary and architectural painter, Jan van der Heyden, was also a pioneer firefighter, so one of the few agreed facts of Bronkhorst's life is that he was a pastry chef in Haarlem. According to Houbraken, that invaluable early biographer of many Dutch artists, he learned to paint from his father, Pieter Bronkhorst (1599-1661), a minor Delft artist, and his drawing of birds remained only a hobby until later in life. Intriguingly a portrait of him in the Rijksmuseum at the age of seventy-eight and in the penultimate year of his life [see above] is inscribed 'KONSTIG WATER-SCHILDER', meaning 'stubborn watercolourist'! While we may never find out any more about Bronkhorst the man, the inclusion of the pair of parrots below his portrait cartouche leave us in no doubt what he was known for. The eight studies here are typical of his late style, and must once have come from the same portfolio as a further twenty-two sheets, all of the same size, technique and date, and of which sixteen were dispersed in recent years at Christie's\*. As here, the birds shown were instantly recognizable and familiar to us in Britain, and included a sparrow, kingfisher, starling, snipe and a turtle dove, among others.

In the heyday of the Dutch republic, bird painters inevitably favoured exotic and ornamental fowl, and the genre reached its zenith in the work of Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636-1695), whose resplendent peacocks alone merit a visit to the Wallace Collection in London. Fittingly, perhaps, in the aftermath of the great days of Holland, Bronkhorst chose the more humble, wild birds native to northern Europe, and nearly every one of the larger corpus of gouaches to which the present group belongs is inscribed 'Ad.Vivum' ['from life']. (The fact that among all the thirty comparable examples only the waxwing and the kingfisher were dead and shown as still lifes further convinces me that Bronkhorst enlisted the help of bird-trappers in order to study live specimens.) This ornithological concern, and the 'tailor-made' backgrounds which he knew or imagined to be correct for each species, are unusual for the period, and further add to our enjoyment of his feathered sitters.

JAMES MITCHELL  
February 2019

\*Christie's, 7th July 2018, lot 48 (set of ten, £17,500); 3rd July 2018, lot 47 (set of six, £10,000).



*Treecreeper*



*Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker*



*Pipit*



*Nightingale*



*Ring Ouzel*



*Crossbill*

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# JOHN MITCHELL

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