

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp (Dordrecht 1612 - Dordrecht 1652)

Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn & Soldiers Playing Dice and a Rider before a Supply Tent

the feast scene with traces of a signature and date on the trough oil on oak panel, a pair diameter: 67.5 cm (26½ in) (tondo) (2)

In this pair of paintings, Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp depicts scenes of the simple, everyday life of villagers and soldiers. In *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn* a group of figures has gathered round the village butcher, who is himself kneeling over a recently killed hog that he is about to gut. His audience watch him, their expressions a mixture of curiosity and revulsion. On the left-hand side, a man milks a cow, whilst other pigs are being readied for slaughter in the background, as part of the preparations of what seems to be a large village celebration with an abundance of food. The inn, the spire of the church and the number of figures involved in the preparations, suggests that this is a community celebrating together.

In the accompanying work, *Soldiers Playing Dice and a Rider before a Supply Tent*, Cuyp has again painted a heavily populated scene. In the foreground two soldiers kneel on the ground in order to play dice, but they are in the midst of discussion, perhaps talking about raising the stakes. They are watched by a woman who cradles her child in her lap. The group are about to be joined by another soldier who has returned from the nearby supply tent clutching his beer and a pipe. On the left-hand side a field stretches out into the distance, and an encampment has been set up there. Dotted about are similar groups of figures relaxing together. Two soldiers sit on horseback, presumably still on duty, chatting together whilst keeping a watchful eye on proceedings.

The present pair of works represent typical examples of Cuyp's varied and lively work. *Rural Village Fair*, (Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede) for instance, shows a peasant celebration and is certainly comparable to *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat Before an Inn*. Villagers are chatting, drinking and

being entertained by a violinist and a play. Whereas *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn* depicts the preparation of a celebration, *Rural Village Fair*, depicts the latter stages of a similar feast, yet they both show the same type of figures and location in a merry genre scene that recurs throughout Cuyp's work.

Many of Cuyp's genre scenes were set in interiors, such as [*The Card Players*](#). Here three peasants, of the type present in *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn*, relax in a dark and gloomy inn.

They are playing a game of cards and so are comparable to the foreground group of gamblers in *Soldiers Playing Dice and a Rider before a Supply Tent*. Cuyp also uses light to highlight the figures against the dark and this characteristic lighting of the central figures is also evident, although not so pronounced, in the present works.

Cuyp's skilled use of light effects is exceptionally dramatic in his history paintings, for which he is most noted. The Hermitage's [*Annunciation to the Shepherds*](#) is dominated by a blinding flash of light as the Archangel Gabriel descends from heaven to tell the startled shepherds of Christ's birth. This deeply shadowed lighting reveals the influence of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) as does the group of figures huddled together. The shepherds are the same scruffy, aged peasant figures found in *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn*. Despite the biblical subject matter the picture still contains the strong peasant imagery found in Cuyp's genre work.

The Hermitage's work came from the collection of Pyotr Petrovich Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky (1827-1914), a noted and influential Russian geographer, who was also a member of the State Council of Imperial Russia. Due to his extensive and groundbreaking explorations of the mountains of the Tyan Shan, Tsar Nicholas II authorised him to add the epithet 'Tyan-Shansky' to his name. During his wide-ranging travels he built up an extensive collection of Dutch Old Masters. In addition to Cuyp, the seven hundred works he left to the Hermitage included work by artists such as [*Salomon van Ruysdael \(? 1600/03-1670\)*](#) and [*Jan Brueghel II \(1601-1678\)*](#). Semyonov's collection was an extremely important addition to the Hermitage as it encompassed schools of painting that were previously only sparsely represented.

In addition to Rembrandt, a significant influence on Cuyp's work were the genre scenes of Adriaen Brouwer (1605-1638). Although Brouwer's scenes tended to focus on the seedier elements of society, it was his sketchy technique, with which he drew his peasant scenes that reveals itself in Cuyp's work. In [*Seated Drinkers*](#), the figures are painted in the same shadowed and slightly sketchy manner in which Cuyp has painted his peasants and soldiers in the present pair of works. Both painters use slightly muted palettes, although where Brouwer enlivens his scenes with splashes of colour, Cuyp uses lighter tones. Cuyp's brushwork was praised by Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719) and described as *ruw* and *meesterlijk* ('rough' and 'masterly').

Cuyp came from a family of noted artists, which included his half-brother Jacob Cuyp (1594-?1652), with whom he studied, and his nephew Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691). In addition to being a painter there is speculation that he may have trained as a doctor because he gave evidence at a medical affair in 1643. Although he was clearly a varied and diverse artist it is difficult to trace Cuyp's stylistic development, as none of his work is dated. He was an important follower of Rembrandt, a painter who was enormously influential on the artistic development of Dordrecht, impacting on artists such as Aelbert Cuyp, Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680) and [*Nicolaes Maes \(1634-1693\)*](#). Benjamin Cuyp's religious paintings range from those that are coloured with delicate pastel shades, to works that are more subdued and monochromatic, in the manner of his genre paintings. In addition to his religious paintings, his oeuvre predominantly depicts the daily lives of peasants, inn scenes, army encampments, the occasional battle scene inspired by [*Esaias van de Velde \(1587-1630\)*](#), and beach scenes.

Provenance:

Private Collection, Switzerland
Koller Auctions, Zürich, 13.-14. May 1982, Lot 5061
European private collection

Artist description:

Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp was born into a Dutch family of artists. Benjamin entered the Guild of St Luke on 27 January 1631. As no dated works by Benjamin are known, it is difficult to chart the artist's development accurately, although several different styles of painting can be isolated. In his handling of religious subjects, Benjamin may be considered an important follower of Rembrandt, with whom, however, he seems to have had no direct contact. His fellow townsmen Paulus Lesire (1611–after 1656) and Hendrik Dethier, who also entered the Guild in 1631, were also strongly influenced by Rembrandt's early work, as indeed were such later Dordrecht artists as Ferdinand Bol, Nicolaes Maes, Samuel van Hoogstraten and Aert de Gelder. Benjamin constructed several variations of Rembrandt's compositions from the late 1620s and early 1630s, in particular *Judas and the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1629; private collection) Benjamin borrowed not only Rembrandt's deeply shadowed lighting but also his characteristic huddled figures and piled-up compositions. In other paintings tentatively assigned to Benjamin's early career, the influence of Leonaert Bramer can be felt in dark monochromatic works consisting of a few figures. These various stylistic elements are combined in the large, ambitious *Adoration of the Magi* (Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum), which displays free, quick brushwork and deeply saturated colours. The influence of Adrian Brouwer and Adrian van Ostade is added to that of Rembrandt and Bramer. Benjamin's achievement was the marriage of a sketchy brush technique with an intensity of light and colour. He came to favour biblical and historical scenes featuring dramatic bursts of light, such as the *Annunciation to the Shepherds*, *the Raising of Lazarus*, *the Resurrection*, *the Liberation of St Peter* and the *Conversion of Saul*. A tumble of figures, one boldly silhouetted, and dramatic flashes of light characterize, for example, the *Conversion of Saul* (Vienna, Gemäldegalerie Akademie der Bildenden Künste). Another group of Benjamin's paintings, also conceived in a painterly style but employing delicate pastel shades of blue, pink and orange, seems to have been strongly influenced by Adrian van Ostade.

Benjamin Cuyp also painted religious and history scenes in a monochrome palette with heavy impasto highlights, for example the *Annunciation to the Shepherds* (Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum), which is constructed in various shades of brown. In smaller-scale interior scenes the influence of Adrian Brouwer and Daniel Teniers can be felt. These include biblical subjects (e.g. *Tobias*; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) but more often are genre paintings, usually of peasants, inn scenes or depictions of soldiers. Benjamin also painted a number of battle or encampment scenes in a loose style influenced by painters such as Gerrit Claesz. Bleker and more generally Esaias van de Velde. Closely connected with these are Benjamin's beach scenes, which usually feature the unloading of fish from boats overseen by gentlemen on horseback. The landscapes that form the settings for these themes show some influence from his half-brother Jacob.

Collections

Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp is represented in the following collections: Dordrechts Museum, Netherlands; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, France; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes; Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels; Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana; National Museums and Galleries of Wales, amongst others.