

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)

Provenance:

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

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.



Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Rural Village Fair*,
Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede (Figure 1)



Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp, *The Card Players*,
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (Figure 2)

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*, see figure 1, 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.



Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Annunciation to the Shepherds*,
The Hermitage, St. Petersburg (Figure 3)

Many of Cuyp's genre scenes were set in interiors, such as *The Card Players* (fig. 2). 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 (fig. 3). 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) (see inventory) and Jan Brueghel II (1601-1678) (see inventory). 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*, see figure 4, 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) (see inventory). 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) (see inventory), and beach scenes.



Adriaen Brouwer, *Seated Drinkers*,
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (Figure 4)



Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Feast with Freshly Slaughtered Meat before an Inn*



Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Soldiers Playing Dice and a Rider before a Supply Tent*