

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



Lucas van Uden (Antwerp 1595 - Antwerp 1672)

Landscape with a Cart Crossing a River

oil on panel

85.1 x 126.4 cm (34½ x 49¾ in)

In *Landscape with a Cart Crossing a River*, Lucas van Uden depicts a horse-drawn cart, laden with huge stones, as it struggles across the uneven ground, a man straining as he tries to help the horses cross the river. The painting is dominated by the craggy cliff, overgrown with gnarled trees it splits the painting in two, with a dark river to the left hand side, and the brightly lit countryside on the right.

There is a distinct split in moods in van Uden's work, with the left-hand side dark and forbidding, the river threatening the progress of the cart and two birds circling ominously overhead. Contrasted to this is the right hand side of the work where the pastoral landscape is bathed in a soft, warm light. Van Uden's watercolours and etchings, for which he is most admired, display this same refined sense of light and mood.

Van Uden's painting is a close repetition of a composition by Peter Paul Rubens' [*Landscape with Stone Carriers*](#). The major difference between the two paintings is that van Uden has eliminated the rider of the near horse. Although it has long been thought that van Uden was a member of Rubens' workshop and provided landscape backgrounds for some of the master's compositions, there is no documentary evidence to support the assumption. Nonetheless, he clearly knew Rubens' work very well, for he copied several other compositions, as well as borrowing specific motifs from the older artist. Van Uden's [*Ulysses and Nausicaa*](#), is another example derived from a Rubens composition, now housed in the Pitti Palace Florence. As in the present work, van Uden uses a more intense palette than the Rubens' version, which is drenched in a soft golden light. However, compositionally van Uden closely follows the prototype.

Van Uden was the son of the town painter of Antwerp. Around 1627 he joined Antwerp's Guild of Saint Luke as a 'master's son'. He travelled along the Rhine from 1644 to 1646 but spent most of his career in Antwerp.

Van Uden's great talent was for observing nature. According to Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719), Van

Uden took walks in the country in the early mornings, solely to sketch. His landscapes tended to be relatively traditional in terms of composition, but notable for the skilful manipulation of light, demonstrated in the present work. He usually painted his own figures, although occasionally he collaborated with [David Teniers II \(1610-1690\)](#).

As discussed van Uden is closely associated with Rubens, although it is uncertain whether they ever worked together. However, in addition to whole compositions, such as the present work, van Uden incorporated many Rubensian elements into his own landscapes, such as a woman carrying a round jug on her head, cows at a watering place, and stylistic devices like foreground trees lit from behind, with yellow-orange-tipped branches.

Provenance:

Otto Schatzker, Vienna, before the Second World War;
Oscar Klein, Vienna by 1935,
thence by descent to the previous American owner.

Literature:

G. Glück, *Die Landschaften des Peter Paul Rubens*, Vienna 1945, p. 56, no. 7 (as probably by L. Van Uden);
W. Adler, *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, Part XVIII, vol. 1, *Landscapes and Hunting Scenes*, under cat. no. 19, p. 80, copy 4.

Artist description:

Lucas van Uden was a Flemish painter, draughtsman and engraver. He was the son of Artus van Uden (b 1544), town painter of Antwerp, and grandson of Pieter van Uden, founder of a noted tapestry and silk factory in the city. Lucas was probably trained by his father and in 1626–7 was enrolled in the Antwerp Guild of St Luke as a 'master's son'. On 14 February 1627 he married Anna van Woelput. On 31 December 1649 he was registered as no longer living in the city, so for a period in 1650 he must have lived elsewhere.

Most of van Uden's works are constructed according to the same plan. The foreground usually has a small bank topped by a few slim birches or other tall trees with transparent foliage; the trees are typically arranged in small groups and are all very straight except for one, which inclines crookedly, usually towards the centre of the panel. In the centre are peaceful fields and meadows, with hamlets, small ponds with reflections of trees and clouds, shrubs and bushes or rows of trees with thick, round foliage. In the background are mountains, which, unlike those in the paintings of many of his predecessors, are not in the least ominous. The colours are rather pale, principally dull green, pinkish brown and the yellow tone of the sunbeams, and the whole is bathed in a silvery green haze. Van Uden often depended on David Teniers for the figures, as can be seen from a number of paintings with both his signature and Teniers's monogram (e.g. *Landscape with Dancing Peasants*; Dublin, National Gallery). Most often, however, the staffage—shepherds, walkers, peasants at work, gipsy girls telling fortunes—was van Uden's own work, frequently influenced by Teniers and Rubens.

Van Uden's careful attention to detail, particularly noticeable in the smaller works, and his search for decorative elements in the larger paintings - for example his contrasting of dark, cool zones with clear, warm ones - place him in the same tradition as Jan Breughel I and Joos de Momper II. Another artist who played an important role in the development of his art was Rubens. Van Uden made a number of more or less literal copies of compositions by Rubens (e.g. *Landscape with Ulysses and Nausicaa*; Barnard Castle, Bowes Museum, after Rubens's painting in Florence, Pitti); elsewhere he reworked compositions to form new ones with a pronounced capriccio character. He also introduced Rubensian elements into many of his own works: a woman carrying a round jug on her head and cows at a watering place, for example, or such stylistic devices as foreground trees lit from behind with the tips of the branches highlighted with yellow-orange touches. But van Uden's paintings lack the grand, broad and synthetic vision that characterizes the work of Rubens, and the reduction of the rich Rubensian colours to a monochrome green tends to make the paintings look somewhat dry. On the other hand, he

achieved a certain grace, intimacy and tenderness in them. He seems to have lacked the strength to develop a personal style that deviated from the paths opened up by Breughel, de Momper and Rubens. His greatest individual talent is shown in his observation of nature, as revealed in such drawings as the *Landscape with Rock Face* (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett) and a few straightforward paintings such as the *Landscape with a Gipsy Girl Telling Fortunes* (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie), made jointly with Teniers.

Van Uden's pupils included Philips Augustin Immenraet (1627–79) and Jan Baptist Bonnecroy (1618–76). His brother Jacob van Uden (fl 1627–9) was a landscape painter too, and Jacob's son Adriaen van Uden (fl 1655–6) and his grandson Pieter van Uden (ii) (fl 1673–4), a miniature painter, were also active in Antwerp.

Collections

Van Uden is represented in the following collections: Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Bruxelles; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; National Gallery, London; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge; Museum Bredius, Netherlands; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Prado Museum, Madrid; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts, amongst others.