

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



Salomon van Ruysdael (Naarden 1600/3 - Haarlem 1670)

A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn

signed 'SVRUYSDAEL' (SVR linked, lower left)

oil on panel

61 x 73.7 cm (24 x 29 in)

In this view of everyday life in seventeenth-century Netherlands, Salomon van Ruysdael has depicted a host of weary travellers gathered outside a popular rural inn. A horseman on a distinctive silver stallion converses with four other figures who sit in a horse-drawn trap. The trap's horses, as well as those attached to the adjacent wagon, are refreshing themselves from troughs. The entrance of the inn is filled with other colourful characters who mill about, taking the chance to stretch and recuperate before continuing on their journeys. A woman holding her barefooted child appears to be one of the gypsies who recur in much of van Ruysdael's work. On the right-hand side of the painting, another fully loaded trap and a lone horseman, accompanied by his faithful dog, have just left the inn to continue their journey. In the foreground, a goat stands by a pool of water around which chickens forage for food - their inclusion enhancing the sense of familiarity to the painting. A large portion of *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is also given over to the type of delicate depiction of an atmospheric cloudy sky at which van Ruysdael excelled.

It was on account of his unembellished interpretations of the surrounding countryside that van Ruysdael gained a reputation amongst his contemporaries. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is an entirely naturalistic painting with figures clad in traditional clothes, posed in natural positions while travellers come and go to a roadside inn - its position clearly ensuring a good trade. As such, the work is typical of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting, which realistically depicted local culture without the intervention of any literary subject matter that was prevalent in other artistic schools. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is painted in a natural palette of greens and browns, with the occasional white highlight and splash of localised colour, characteristic of van Ruysdael's later works. It is also typical of his compositions of this genre, in which a rugged road stretches across the painting, with the illusion of space heightened by a darkened area in the left foreground, which contrasts with the intensely lit road.

The subject of a halt before an inn was one which van Ruysdael returned to repeatedly throughout his career, painting similar scenes at least thirty-eight times from 1631 to 1667, a typical example being [*Halt at an Inn*](#) of 1649.¹ Although the landscape in *Halt at an Inn* is slightly more expansive than the one in the present work, they both share many of the features of van Ruysdael's best work. Once again, in one corner of the painting, figures are taking a rest on their journey and have stopped at the inn, in order to recuperate. In both works there are a range of figures who chat to each other, wait patiently or attend to the travellers and their animals. Again farmyard animals mill about amongst the figures and in both works these corners create charming genre scenes of seventeenth-century Dutch rural life. Both works also feature a diagonal composition with a road receding into the distant landscape. The flatness of the Dutch landscape is offset by the vertical nature of the rather spindly trees that rise elegantly into sky. Van Ruysdael's skill in conveying the lazy drift of clouds across a bright sky is again evident in *Halt at an Inn*, as is his use of splashes of red to enliven the cool palette of his landscapes, both features of the present work.

Another example of this type of scene, for which van Ruysdael is so admired, is the Rijksmuseum's [*Village Inn with Stagecoach*](#). Amongst the group of figures outside the building is a figure on a bright white horse, a motif comparable to the one in *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*. A dark swathe of shadow sweeps across the foreground of both works, which creates a contrast with the predominant bright atmosphere of the scenes and serves as a repoussoir to the figural groups. The same compositional diagonal is again formed by the buildings, with which van Ruysdael cleverly guides the viewer's eye through the scene. In both works a few carefully composed trees catch the eye, and these distinctive features animate the landscape almost as much as the various figures.

Van Ruysdael's [*Tavern with May Tree*](#) has more of an urban setting than *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* but the works have many comparable features. In addition to the characteristic features already discussed, such as the towering trees, the staffage and a beautiful study of a cloudy sky, *Tavern with a May Tree* has a small body of shallow foreground water comparable to the puddle in the present work in which the goat stands. Despite the small size of these respective pools of water they are beautifully depicted by van Ruysdael, showing his skill at capturing the subtle effects of light on water. The blues and whites are delicately reflected and contrast with the darker browns of the surrounding muddy ground.

The study of the reflection of a cloudy sky on an expanse of water, evident on a small scale in *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*, was one of the key features of much of van Ruysdael's work. In addition to the subject of travellers stopping outside an inn, many of his paintings are river views, examples being the Hermitage's [*Ferry Boat near Arnheim*](#) and the Louvre's [*Arrival of the Ferry*](#). Such river scenes are 'a harmony of air and water' painted in an almost monochromatic palette, the focus of which is the reflection of the cloudy sky on water.² In *Arrival of the Ferry* the composition is dominated by the still water and the sky, making the majority of the painting a study in reflections. Despite the very different subject matter, there are many other comparable features, such as the tall, thin trees, the travellers in the cart who wait for the ferry, and the skilful rendering of clouds drifting across the sky.

Van Ruysdael predominantly painted these types of river views in the 1630s although in this period his first foray into the depiction of wagons stopping before buildings were painted. The following decade, however, he turned to the subject with a particular interest as he moved towards a statelier depiction of the Dutch countryside, that is often seen as representing a new 'classicising' period of Dutch landscape painting. This theme can be traced to the work of earlier Flemish landscapists, such as [*Jan Brueghel the Younger \(1601-1678\)*](#) but van Ruysdael adapted and developed the theme extensively. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is one of his most sophisticated treatments of the theme, with the inn playing a significant role and the compositional diagonal less insistent than in other examples.

The subject of the present work was also explored by van Ruysdael's contemporaries, such as [*Halt at an Inn*](#), has many comparable aspects to *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*. In both works, a crowd of figures stand outside a remote, but busy, wayside inn. The variety of figures and animals capture the viewer's attention and provide flashes of colour to an otherwise restrained palette.

Although the compositions have been reversed, a diagonal leads the eye from the foreground grouping across the paintings to where the background landscape opens up. The dark shadow in the foreground is also present in *Halt at an Inn*, and this device was in fact taken by van Ruysdael from de Molijn's work. Other features of de Molijn's painting, such as the tall, thin trees, which balance the flatness of the Dutch landscape, or the significant attention given to the depiction of the sky, are also comparable to *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*.

Van Ruysdael was born to a moderately wealthy cabinetmaker in Gooiland. Originally named Salomon de Gooyer, he adopted the name Ruysdael from Castle Ruisdael (or Ruisschendaal) near his father's home town. He moved to Haarlem, joining the Guild of St. Luke in 1623, and quickly established an excellent reputation among that city's artistic community for his unembellished depictions of the surrounding countryside. Although his teacher is unknown, his early works reveal the influence of [Esaias van de Velde \(1587-1630\)](#) and de Molijn. He was praised for paintings, such as *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*, as early as 1628, when Samuel van Ampzing (1590-1632) described him as 'good at landscapes with small figures in them' in a section on famous Haarlem painters in his town history, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* ('Description and Praise of the Town of Haarlem'). During the 1630s van Ruysdael started to paint river scenes, and he became, together with de Molijn and Jan van Goyen, with whom he worked closely, one of the leading exponents of the 'tonal' phase of Dutch landscape painting in Haarlem. This movement brought an unprecedented naturalistic unity to landscapes through diagonal designs, atmospheric effects and a restricted ('monochromatic') palette of earth tones.

As his career progressed van Ruysdael's work became more varied, in terms of techniques, although he restricted himself to a narrow range of subject matter and, particularly after 1640, an easily identifiable style. Many of these changes were in accordance with the classicising developments of Dutch landscape painting in general, under the influence of Dutch Italianates such as [Cornelis van Poelenburch \(1594-1667\)](#) and Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657). In part, this was determined by the art market; once an artist had found a successful and popular style, he could repeat compositions and motifs endlessly. Nevertheless, despite the dangers of predictability, van Ruysdael's art always retains a sense of vitality and freshness and by the late 1640s he was one of the most important painters in Haarlem.

Like many Dutch painters, van Ruysdael also had an extra-artistic career; he was mentioned as a merchant in 1651, dealing in blue dye for Haarlem's bleacheries. He was a practicing Mennonite but held several offices in the local painters' Guild. His wife, Maycken Buyse, was buried in St Bavo's Church in Haarlem at Christmas 1660. He too was buried there in 1670. While van Ruysdael seems to have lived his entire life in Haarlem, topographical references in his landscape paintings suggest that he visited many places throughout the Netherlands, including Leiden, Utrecht, Amersfoort, Arnhem, Alkmaar, Rhenen and Dordrecht. In addition to landscapes, numerous river views, and seascapes, which all endeavor to capture the atmospheric conditions of the Dutch countryside, van Ruysdael also painted a few still lifes. His son, Salomon van Ruysdael (c.1629/30-1681), also became a landscape painter and was heavily influenced by his father.

Although there is no documentary evidence, it is very possible that van Ruysdael also taught his nephew Jacob van Ruisdael (1638/9-1682). Certainly van Ruisdael's early work, such as *A Windmill near Fields* (1646; Cleveland Museum of Arts, Ohio) show his uncle's influence. As Seymour Slive says of this work, which van Ruisdael painted at the age of eighteen, 'the mother-of-pearl pink, blue, grey and white of the streaky clouds and late afternoon sky recall effects achieved' by his uncle.³ However, by the end of van Ruysdael's career it was his work that was being influenced by his nephew, as he included features such as a rocky foreground or a gnarled leafless tree.

Van Ruysdael was a highly accomplished painter and in works such as *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* his paintings came to encompass all that lovers of Dutch art admire - the ease of the subject matter, the scene's naturalistic appearance, and the attention to the effects of light and weather. Indeed, such works had a significant impact on the tradition of landscape painting in Haarlem and in many ways have come to represent the genre itself.

¹ Stechow, W., *Salomon van Ruysdael eine Einführung in Seine Kunst mit Kritischem Katalog der Gemälde*, (Berlin, 1938), cat. nos. 145-176.

² Fuchs, R. H., *Dutch Painting*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1978), p. 114

³ Slive, S., *Jacob van Ruysdael: Master of Landscape*, exh. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2005, p. 40.

Provenance:

A.C. Wolfson, Esq., Parrock Hill House, Coleman's Hatch, East Sussex, until 1960;
with Douwes, Amsterdam, 1960.

Artist description:

Salomon van Ruysdael was born in Naarden where his father, Jacob Jansz. de Goyer (c. 1560–1616), was a moderately wealthy cabinetmaker. Although Salomon initially used the name 'de Go(o)yer' [of Gooiland], he soon followed the example of his eldest brother and adopted 'Ruysdael' from the castle of Ruijschdaal in Gooiland, which may once have been a family possession. Shortly after his father's death, Salomon and another brother, Isaack van Ruysdael (1599–1677), a painter, framemaker and dealer, moved to Haarlem, where Salomon entered the Guild of St Luke in 1623 (as 'Salomon de Gooyer').

Among Salomon's earliest paintings are three winter scenes dated 1627 (e.g. *Frozen Landscape with Skaters*, Vienna, Ksthist. Mus.). The composition of each, with its low horizon and narrow strip of land in the foreground punctuated by small playful figures, recalls the work of Hendrick Avercamp and, particularly, Esaias van de Velde. Other paintings from these years represent the sandy and hilly terrain bordering Haarlem. Many are clearly dependent on Pieter Molyn, a key figure in the rise of realistic Dutch landscape painting who also lived in the town. Van Ruysdael's *Landscape with a Peasant Farmhouse* (1631; Berlin, Gemäldegal.) conforms to a pattern for depicting dunes that Molyn had evolved: a rugged country road stretches obliquely from the right foreground to the left middle distance, while a second diagonal formed by the trees moves in a contrapuntal direction from the upper right of the painting. The illusion of space is further heightened by a darkened area in the left foreground, which contrasts with the intensely lit road. Van Ruysdael's palette of greens and browns also suggests the influence of Molyn. Van Ruysdael quickly gained a reputation among his contemporaries in Haarlem for his direct unembellished interpretations of the surrounding countryside, and in 1628 Samuel van Ampzing included van Ruysdael in his town history (*Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland* ['Description and praise of the town of Haarlem in Holland']), in a section dealing with famous Haarlem painters; he referred to him and Gerrit Claesz. Bleker (fl 1625–56) as 'good at landscapes with small figures in them'.

During the early 1630s van Ruysdael began to paint river scenes, probably in emulation of Esaias van de Velde, but also in close parallel with van Goyen, who simultaneously began to develop the same theme in a similar way. The painters must have been in close personal contact, and in 1634 van Goyen was fined three guilders by the Haarlem guild for painting without permission in the house of Salomon's brother Isaack. Painting during this decade in Haarlem is known as the 'tonal phase' since it is generally characterized by an extreme restraint, with colour restricted to striations of greys, greens, yellows, browns and blues. An early example of van Ruysdael's work in this rather severe style is his *River Bank with Old Trees* (1633; The Hague, Mauritshuis), in which he confined himself to a near monochromatic palette of blue-grey tones. Also typical is the composition: instead of arranging the elements parallel to the picture plane, a space-creating diagonal consisting of the bank and distant sailing vessels and trees was employed. The draining of colour has a unifying effect, as does the mirroring of the trees and boats on the ruffled surface of the water. However, this economy of pictorial means could not last indefinitely, and by the late 1630s he had begun to use purer and more varied hues.

These changes in van Ruysdael's art became more absolute after 1640, and he moved further away from the example of van Goyen. He reduced the number of trees in his compositions to one central cluster; his colours became more varied and bright; a new emphasis was given to the clouds, and in place of the familiar wedge-shaped river views, broader expanses of water began to appear. He also began to depict other types of landscapes, for example halts before inns. This transformation in his art

can be seen as part of a wider movement in landscape painting from tonality towards a 'classicizing' of the subject. The impulse to paint the more mundane features of the Dutch environment in a relatively uncomplicated manner was supplanted by a desire to imbue the landscape with a new sense of grandeur and refinement, perhaps under the influence of such early Dutch Italianates as Cornelis van Poelenburgh and Bartholomeus Breenbergh.

This tendency towards a greater stateliness can be observed in *River Bank near Liesvelt* (1642; Munich, Alte Pin.). While the painting still features a diagonally projecting mass of land to the right, its severity is offset by a group of tall slender trees and strong horizontals and verticals created through the boats and fishing nets on the left. The same is true of the use of colour. An overall yellow-brown tonality is enlivened with more intense values and splashes of local colour. A painting from the end of this decade, *River Landscape with Ferry* (1649; London, N.G.), shows van Ruysdael's progression from his earlier style at a more advanced stage. Here he adopted the river views with ferries by Jan Breughel the elder and Esaias van de Velde but brought greater dramatic interest to the subject with his highly animated figural groups that crowd the small vessels. Van Ruysdael was also concerned with the introduction of compositional variation and achieved it by the zigzag rhythms of the river banks that gently recede towards the church and village, and, to the left, in the diagonal of the three sketchily indicated sailing boats. The work also features a greater definition of form and an even stronger colouristic sense, especially evident in the warm glowing reds of the mounted figures in the ferry.

After 1640 van Ruysdael also began to paint what are often categorized as 'marines'; however, in van Ruysdael's case, this term is inappropriate as he preferred calm inland stretches of water to stormy seas. Works from the 1640s that feature large expanses of river and lake (e.g. *Laying the Net*, Frankfurt am Main, Städel. Kstinst. & Städt. Gal.) are indebted to van Goyen, but van Ruysdael introduced subtle variations of colour into the predominant grey tonality. Paint is applied quite thickly and with great haste in some passages, especially in the sky. A successful recurrent motif is the graceful line of sailing boats, which almost imperceptibly diminish in size towards the horizon. Ruysdael also painted related scenes of water and shipping in an upright format, thus giving them greater structure and presence. *Sailing Boats on an Inland Sea* (c. 1650; Rotterdam, Mus. Boymans–van Beuningen) is a particularly striking example; a broad sweep of water extends perpendicularly from the picture plane, creating the illusion that the viewer is actually on the water, observing the scene from a nearby craft.

In 1647 and again in 1669 van Ruysdael was named an officer of the Guild of St Luke and in 1648 a deacon. Like many of his contemporaries, he did not earn his living exclusively from painting, and in 1651 he was recorded as a merchant dealing in blue dye for Haarlem's famous bleacheries. Around 1650 van Ruysdael returned to the subject of the winter landscape. His *View of Dordrecht* (1653; Zurich, Ksthaus) recalls the winter scenes painted in the 1640s by van Goyen and Isaack van Ostade. Across the wide frozen Maas, peopled by tiny skating figures, horsedrawn sledges and a tent in the left foreground, the prominent tower of the Groote Kerk looms large. Through his concentration on the sky with its large cumulus clouds reflected on to the ice below, he powerfully evoked the crisp atmospheric conditions of a fine winter's day.

Ruysdael also painted a limited number of still-lives. Seven such signed and dated works were executed between 1659 and 1662; these invariably show hunting equipment together with game (e.g. *Hunter's Bag with Dead Birds*, 1662; The Hague, Mus. Bredius), and the elements are usually arranged on a stone plinth against a muted grey background and are clearly inspired by similar compositions executed by Willem van Aelst and the Hague painter Cornelis Lelienbergh (c. 1626–after 1676). Another popular motif of van Ruysdael's was that of horsemen and carriages congregating before an inn. (It appears with slight variations in over 30 works from the mid-1630s to the last decade of his life.) One of the largest and finest examples is *The Halt* (1661; Dublin, N.G.), in which three clusters of trees and a towering tavern are silhouetted against a bright windswept sky which fills almost two-thirds of the canvas. Although the composition is still controlled by a gently sloping diagonal that moves from the tree-tops in the right foreground to the low horizon on the left, the use of brilliant colour and the stressing of such details as the trees are characteristic of van Ruysdael's later phase. Some of van Ruysdael's last works, for example *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus* (1668; Rotterdam, Mus. Boymans–van Beuningen), clearly reveal the impact of his nephew Jacob van Ruisdael: a gnarled leafless tree and rocky area in the foreground, divided by a running brook from a lush green panorama with a castle

beyond, are all elements that appear in the work of van Ruysdael.

Throughout his career, Ruysdael restricted himself to a narrow range of subject-matter and, particularly after 1640, an easily identifiable style. In part, this was determined by the art market; once an artist had found a successful and popular style, he could repeat compositions and motifs endlessly. Nevertheless, despite the dangers of predictability, van Ruysdael's art never has a tired appearance and always retains a sense of vitality and freshness.

Infrared reflectography carried out on a number of works by Salomon van Ruysdael has revealed extensive charcoal underdrawings in works from the 1630s. The sketch beneath *River Landscape with Footbridge* (1631; London, N.G.) establishes how van Ruysdael first rapidly mapped out the main components of the scene. It was only when he began to apply paint to the panel that smaller elements such as figures were added and other details undertaken. As no independent drawings by van Ruysdael are known, it is probable, at least in his early period, that he drew directly on to the support in his studio without first making preliminary studies.

Infrared photographs of later paintings (e.g. *River Landscape with Fishermen*, 1645; Madrid, Mus. Thyssen-Bornemisza) show no evidence of underdrawing and indicate that he composed his landscape views directly on the canvas or panel, making changes and additions as he worked. Presumably as he became more accomplished and reworked familiar themes, there was no longer a need to outline his compositions. Despite spending his entire career at Haarlem, van Ruysdael probably made extensive trips throughout the Netherlands since there are views by him of Leiden, Utrecht, Amersfoort, Arnhem, Alkmaar and Rhenen. Works such as *View of Rhenen* (1648; London, N.G.), which has no underdrawing, suggest that it and similar paintings were the products of memory, something borne out by topographical inaccuracies. Alternatively, he may have used topographical prints, at least as an *aide-mémoire* when he composed the scene in his studio.

In general, van Ruysdael painted thinly on a light-coloured ground and during his tonal period often allowed the grain of the panel to become visible in places. This practice not only binds the entire composition together but also gives the paint layers an added depth.

Collections

Works by van Ruysdael are represented in the following collections: Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Louvre, Paris; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Frick Collection, New York; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Royal Collection, London; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland; Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague, amongst others.