SPHINX FINE ART

Jacob Cats (Altona 1741 - Amsterdam 1799)

A Swineherd with Three Pigs on a Track, a Windmill Beyond & A Peasant Watering his Animals at a Ford

signed, dated and inscribed 'Bij Heemskerk J: Cats Ao 1772' (verso, 1)
black chalk, pen and grey and brown ink, grey wash, pen and grey ink framing lines, a pair (2)
16.2 x 21.3 cm (6⅜ x 8⅜ in); 17.6 x 24.5 cm (6⅞ x 9⅝ in)

A Swineherd with Three Pigs on a Track, a Windmill Beyond and *A Peasant Watering his Animals at a Ford* are classic representations of the idyllic landscapes executed by Jacob Cats. In contrast to *Winter Landscape with Peasants with a Sledge by a Farm, a Town Beyond,* the present drawings depict summer scenes, characterised by atmospheric tranquillity, the abundant foliage of the trees, and the well-nourished contentment of grazing animals.

The first of these representations of pastoral harmony, *A Swineherd with Three Pigs on a Track, a Windmill Beyond,* depicts an unmistakably Dutch landscape with a windmill, gnarled oak trees, thatched cottage and a peasant herding his pigs along a well-kept path. Cats' expert ability in capturing the appearance of the sun-dappled leaves of the trees and the texture and tonality of the scene is evident. A drawing executed three years prior to the present one, *Landscape with Cottage and Figures at the Side of a Road,* in the Courtauld Gallery, London, depicts similarly engaging compositional elements and a concern with spatial depth and the effects of light and shade.

The second of the two drawings, *A Peasant Watering his Animals at a Ford,* is equally expressive in its depiction of a hillier and wilder landscape with rugged rocky outcrops. Another version of the work is housed in the Fogg Museum at Harvard. The two drawings, while strikingly similar, also bear perceptible differences. The present one appears heavier and more confident in its use of line and shading then the Harvard version. Details such as the shadowing on the path, the delineation of the foliage on the trees and the positioning of the animals in relation to the landscape differ between the two images, although Cats' ability to imitate his own work is impressive. Cats is known to have been amenable to reworking past compositions as he is believed to have presented clients with a sample book of his drawings, from which they could choose their favourite subjects, motifs or whole compositions for him to replicate.[1] The works in his existing sample books are numbered on the verso in the artist's hand and the Harvard drawing bears such a number. Perhaps, therefore, it was executed

first, and a client who liked the result then commissioned *A Peasant Watering his Animals at a Ford.*

Cats, the son of the Dutch book dealer Johannes Cats, was trained as a bookbinder and engraver. He studied first under Abraham Starre, then with Pieter Louw (d.1800), and finally with the pattern designer Gerard van Rossum (c.1690-1772). For three years following, he became a wallpaper painter in the Amsterdam factory of Jan Hendrik Troost van Groenendoelen. At the age of twenty-one, Cats established his own business painting wall-hangings, and was considerably successful until the fashion began to decline. He then took up drawing, specialising in topographical views and landscapes, and also began executing copies of famous paintings by artists such as Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Gerrit Dou (1613-1675). Cats' drawings were reproduced in prints by some of his contemporaries such as Isaac Jansz. de Wit (1744-1809), Cornelis Ploos van Amstel (1726-1798) and Jan Evert Grave (1759-1805).

[1] Turner, J.S., 'Jacob Cats and the Identification of a "Pseudo-Goll van Franckenstein" Numbering System', in *Master Drawings,* XXVIII, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), pp. 323-331.

Provenance:

Colonel H.A. Clowes; Christie's, London, 17 February 1950, lot 3 (to Clowes) and by descent

Artist description:

Jacob Cats was a Dutch draughtsman and painter.

He was born in Altona, near Hamburg. He was the son of Johannes Cats, a Dutch bookdealer who moved back to Amsterdam from Germany following the death of his second wife shortly after Jacob's birth.

Jacob was trained as a bookbinder and as an engraver, first under Abraham Starre and later with Pieter Louw. After further training with the pattern designer Gerard van Rossum (c. 1690–1772), he became a wallpaper painter in the Amsterdam factory of Jan Hendrik Troost van Groenendoelen, for whom he worked for three and a half years. In May 1762, Cats established his own wallpaper factory, with financial assistance from his relative Willem Writs and from Jan de Bosch and Johann Goll van Franckenstein the elder.

Cats was also a skilled amateur draughtsman, specializing in topographical views and landscapes, such as *Two Shepherds Conversing before a Large Tree* (Hamburg, Kunsthalle). He also made copies of famous paintings such as Rembrandt's *Night Watch* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.) and Gerrit Dou's *The Poultry-seller* (Waddeson Manor, Bucks). Cats's drawings are usually signed and dated and often inscribed and numbered on the *verso.* Those that are numbered are less finished, usually in black chalk alone or with some grey wash, and frequently correspond with highly finished versions in watercolour or pen and ink; the numbers could thus refer to sheets in a pattern or sample book from which potential clients could select subjects to be produced as independent works of art. Cats's drawings were sometimes reproduced in prints, for example by Isaac Jansz. de Wit (1744–1809), who etched a series of *The Months,* H. M. Schouten (fl. 1815), Cornelis Ploos van Amstel and his student Jan Evert Grave (1759–1805).

On 16 April 1800 Cats's collection was sold at auction, some of which was bought by Carel Joseph Fodor.