

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



**Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp (Dordrecht 1612 - Dordrecht 1652)**

## **Soldiers Repairing Fortifications**

signed 'b. \*uyp. f 16\*\*' (lower right)

oil on canvas

101.6 x 152.1 cm (40 x 59 7/8 in)

Benjamin Gerritsz. Cuyp here depicts a bustling crowd on the bank of a canal where the town's fortifications are under repair. The horizontal band of lazy figures in the foreground contrasts with this scene of great activity taking place in front of them. On the right-hand side, an extensive landscape cluttered with the tents of the soldiers' encampment stretches away into the dusk.

The wooden jetty which cuts across the foreground of the composition heaves with people, who either sit on the jetty itself or in boats moored alongside it. These figures appear to be soldiers, relaxing at the end of a day of hard labour as they huddle together chatting and swigging from huge tankards. A few serving women attempt to keep pace with their drinking and a figure on a horse patrols, perhaps to ensure that the revelry does not get out of hand. Beyond the jetty, a sluice gate, intricately wrought against the rosy twilight, marks the entrance of an indistinct town.

*Soldiers Repairing Fortifications* represents an unusual painting in Cuyp's oeuvre since he did not typically paint such extensive landscapes as the one seen here. He was, however, an extremely versatile artist and the present work combines many of the more distinctive features of his work. His landscapes were predominantly coastal ones, such as [Landscape with Fishermen](#), which like *Soldiers Repairing Fortifications*, features significant bodies of both land and water as well as skilfully incorporating sharp recession, straight back into the composition. The figures on horseback in *Landscape with Fishermen* is also a recurrent motif often employed by the artist and also features prominently in *Soldiers Repairing Fortifications*.

The foreground scene in the present work is comparable to many of the interior genre scenes which Cuyp painted throughout his career, [an example of which](#) hangs in the Rijkmuseum, Amsterdam. The music, drinking and smoking that are depicted in the inn scene are reminiscent of the jovial mood in the foreground of *Soldiers Repairing Fortifications*. The two paintings are also painted in Cuyp's characteristic broad brushstrokes, which Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719) described as *ruw* and *meesterlijk* (rough and masterly).

Cuyp was born into a Dutch family of artists the half-brother of Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp (1594-?1652) and uncle of Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691). Cuyp's work is extremely varied. In his handling of religious subjects, he is considered to be an important follower of Rembrandt (1606-1669). As the Hermitage's [\*Annunciation to the Shepherds\*](#) illustrates, Cuyp not only employed Rembrandt's deeply shadowed lighting but also his characteristic huddled figures and busy compositions; such a figure arrangement is also a feature of the present work. In contrast to these historical and biblical scenes featuring dramatic bursts of light, Cuyp also painted smaller-scale interior scenes, influenced by Adriaen Brouwer (1605/6-1638) and [\*David Teniers the Younger \(1610-1690\)\*](#).

### Provenance:

The Rt. Hon. Lord St. Audries, Williton, Somerset;  
Christie's, London, 8 April 1925, lot 25 (60 gns. to de Casseres), signed & dated '1636';  
Collection of Mr Lorant Goldschlager, London, 1964 (where the date was recorded as 1636);  
Sotheby's, 15 July 1970, lot 74.

### 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.