

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



Palamedes Palamedesz., called Steven Stevaerts (London 1607 - Delft 1638)

A Cavalry Skirmish

oil on panel

49.4 x 85.4 cm (19½ x 33⅝ in)

In this scene, Palamedes Palamedesz. has depicted a violent and frenzied battle. The battle is made up of a series of cavalry soldiers engaged in single duels, some have their swords drawn whilst others exchange pistol fire. In the centre of the painting is a detailed depiction of one of these clashes between two soldiers. The figure on the rearing, white horse fires down at his enemy. The shot man reels with the force of the bullet, his sword is useless as his steed slides along the ground. This creates an eye-catching contrast between the dominant and the fallen horses. Behind the two central figures, a melee of fighters in which multiple individual battles take place and the occasional detail, such as the flash of gunpowder or the thrust of a sword, can be made out. On the left-hand side of the painting, a man crawls away from the skirmish, his musket thrown from his grasp, and he is obviously struggling for breath. He has been knocked from his horse, which lies injured behind him, a small splash of blood below its belly. In the background a smaller group of fighters who have broken apart from the main battle can be seen.

The composition is almost identical to another of Palamedesz.'s paintings, [Cavalry Battle](#) (Stockholms Universitet Konstsamling, Stockholm). There is the same central clash projecting from the throng of battle, from which the same figures and poses can be discerned. Palamedesz. was a specialist in painting military encampments and battle scenes and there are many recurring themes and motifs that appear in his work, in particular the image of a prominent, white rearing horse. It is unusual, however, for Palamedesz. to have painted two compositions quite so similar. In both paintings, as is characteristic of the battle paintings in which Palamedesz. specialised, the scenes include no identifiable individuals or parties. This stands in marked contrast to the sixteenth-century tradition of battle pictures in Italy and Germany, where a greater emphasis is given to the heroism of specific soldiers and military leaders.

Palamedesz.'s paintings of cavalry battles are clearly related to the work of the Haarlem painter [Esaias van de Velde \(1587-1630\)](#). In [Battle](#) van de Velde has presented detailed depictions of a few figures, set against the great indiscernible throng of the battle behind, a technique Palamedesz. has also used. Again there is a contrast between dominance and helplessness and an interest in the dramatic sights of battle. The dark anonymity of the armoured cavalry soldiers however, gives van de Velde's painting a sinister feel. Rather than an evenly matched battle, the scene appears to represent merciless carnage.

Palamedesz. was a Dutch painter and the younger brother and pupil of Anthonie Palamedesz. (1601-1673). He was born in London, where his father, a gem cutter, was in the service of King James I, although the family was originally from Delft. After the family returned to Delft, Palamedesz joined the Guild of St. Luke in 1627 and he can be considered part of the group of immigrants who revitalised the artistic climate of the city, along with figures such as his brother, Frans Spierincx (c.1550-1630) or Hans Jordaens I (c.1555-1630). He married the daughter of a wealthy Delft family in 1630 and the couple had four children. In 1631 Palamedesz. is recorded in Antwerp, where he had his portrait painted by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). He died in Delft and was buried there.

Artist description:

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