

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



Simon Jacobsz de Vlieger (Rotterdam 1600 - Weesp 1653)

A Wooded Landscape with a Flock of Sheep on a Track

oil on panel
72.8 x 67.6 cm (28⁵/₈ x 26⁵/₈ in)

Best known for his seascapes, *A Wooded Landscape with a Flock of Sheep on a Track* is a rare example of Simon de Vlieger's wooded landscapes. A flock of sheep are being guided with their lambs from under the leafy shade towards the warm glow of the setting sun. Dominating the foreground is the thick trunk of a tree, whose twisted and exposed roots lead our eye to a wolf below. He licks his paws in anticipation of the sheep he is hoping will pass his way; as they approach the cross point on the path, deciding which way to turn, one ponders on their fate. De Vlieger demonstrates a great understanding of the depiction of animals in the present work, further demonstrated in his large signed drawing *Goats before a Shed* (Berlin, Kupferstichkab), and in a series of 10 prints that he produced representing various types of domesticated animals.

In *A Wooded Landscape with a Flock of Sheep on a Track*, de Vlieger combines almost Italianate atmospheric effects in the billowy and swirling clouds that dominate the upper part of the painting, in a scene that is likely to have been inspired by his native Dutch countryside. The wonderfully full canopies of the trees are filled with a rich deep green foliage, that has turned a musky brown where it is touched by the sun's rays; the attention paid to the numerous elements of the landscape demonstrate de Vlieger's great skill in detailing.

Principally known as a marine artist, de Vlieger's *A Wooded Landscape with a Flock of Sheep on a Track* is one of a few surviving paintings of forest subjects by the artist, *Landscape with Hunters* in the Museum of Fine Art, Budapest being another such example. Despite the few oils that are known to exist, de Vlieger's attraction to this subject matter is clearly manifested in the large number of chalk drawings of wooded landscapes that he produced, often on blue paper, such as those in the Kupferstichkab, Berlin and the Groninger Museum.

De Vlieger was one of the leading marine and landscape artists of the Dutch school, influencing the direction of Dutch marine art during the 1630s and 1640s. In early 1634 deVlieger moved from Rotterdam to Delft, becoming a member of the Guild of St. Luke that same year. He provided designs for the festivities associated with Marie de Medici's visit to Amsterdam, designed tapestries for Delft's magistrates, painted organ shutters for Rotterdam's Laurenskerk, and designed stained glass windows for Amsterdam's prestigious Nieuwe Kerk.

Although his training is undocumented, de Vlieger's early paintings display similarities with the monochrome palette of Jan Porcellis. He had developed his work by the 1640s to produce a style that had become his own, as exemplified in his [*Arrival of William of Orange in Rotterdam*](#), 1642, in the Hermitage, in which the skilled execution of the romantic whisked up sky recalls that of his *A Wooded Landscape with a Flock of Sheep on a Track*. His early tendency to portray dramatic rocky coasts gave way to placid, deeply spatial marine vistas, whose firmly structured compositions and calm seas influenced a number of prominent marine painters, such as [*Willem van de Velde the younger*](#), Hendrik Dubbels and Jan van de Cappelle. It is noted that van de Cappelle owned numerous paintings by de Vlieger, and more than 1300 drawings by him, suggesting that he obtained much of his material from de Vlieger's estate.

De Vlieger also produced a few history paintings, which incorporated marine settings. In addition to these, he produced a few rare landscape paintings, such as the present work, which anticipated works by Jacob van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema. De Vlieger was also a notable draughtsman and etcher, drawing particularly fine townscapes and large-scale topographical subjects. His pupils included Hendrick van Anthonissen (1606-after 1660), Claes Claesz Wou (c.1592- 1665), Pieter Mulier the Elder (c.1615-1670), Abraham van Beyerens and Hendrick Martensz. Sorgh (1611-1670).

We are grateful to Mrs Marijke de Kinkelder of the RKD, The Hague, for confirming the attribution after inspection of the original (verbal communication, 18 March 2008).

Artist description:

Simon de Vlieger was a Dutch painter, mainly important for his marine pieces. He was versatile, and won important public commissions in his birthplace, Rotterdam, and in Delft and Amsterdam, for jobs such as painting organ shutters and designing stained-glass windows; he also did landscape paintings and etchings. Initially influenced by Vroom, in the 1630s he adopted the limited, grey palette of Porcellis, and went on to explore atmospheric effects in a much wider range of silvery tones; such mature works as *Beach Scene* (1643; The Hague, Mauritshuis) render the evocative play of light against a vast expanse of cloudy sky and sea. He painted beach scenes, storms, rocky coastlines, calms, and parade subjects, in which a variety of vessels is shown, often by the device of depicting the arrival of anonymous dignitaries. He had a strong influence on the next generation of marine artists: van de Cappelle had a huge collection of his drawings and paintings, and van de Velde the younger was his pupil.

Collections

De Vlieger is represented in the following collections: Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge, UK; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; National Gallery, London, UK; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Bowes Museum, County Durham, UK; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK; Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, amongst others.