

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



Abraham Blommaert (Middelburg 1626 - Middelburg c. 1675)

Elegant Hunting Company

signed 'A. Blommaert' (lower right) oil on panel 49.5 x 67 cm (19½ x 26¾ in)

In the foreground of this beautifully composed landscape, Abraham Blommaert has depicted the culmination of a hunt. Two figures on horseback are chasing a deer, the one in a green coat shooting their prey from close range, whilst his companion looks on. A servant, struggling to keep up with the party, blows into his hunting horn, his cheeks puffed out from the effort. In his other hand he clutches a spear, in case the animal is wounded and needs to be swiftly killed. A pack of hounds accompany the figures, one of which, knowing that the hind's capture is inevitable, has raced ahead towards a stag which has just bounded off the rocks into a river. Blommaert's depiction of the foreground group conveys the frenzied mood of the chase; the animals are sprinting at full pelt through the landscape, the hind looks pained and arches her back in agony as she is shot, and the stag's muscular body is taut with effort as he tries to escape his pursuers. Throughout the work other pairs of huntsmen are depicted, wielding their long rifles as they look for game.

The landscape is composed in two clearly distinct parts. From the river in the bottom-left hand corner a hill rises sharply, culminating in an abandoned medieval castle and beyond this, the mountain range continues. The steep rise is accentuated by the lofty tree which towers over the scene and this, along with the other foliage, is especially finely depicted by Blommaert. In comparison the terrain of the right-hand side of the painting is extremely flat and a valley stretches away to the background where a town sits on the edge of a vast lake. The landscape is bathed in a warm golden light and the palette of cool greens, yellows and blues unifies the sprawling scene.

Elegant Hunting Company is a typical example of Blommaert's work and shares many of the features of the Hermitage's *Rocky Landscape with a Dry Tree* (1664). Again a castle sits atop a hill, framing the composition, a motif that recurs throughout Blommaert's work. Although not as animated as in the

present work, the Hermitage's painting also contains the fine, almost calligraphic, rendering of the foliage that is such a distinctive aspect of *Elegant Hunting Company*. Blommaert's landscapes also invariably feature dramatic undulations and this is evident in both the present work and the Hermitage work.

It has only come to light relatively recently that Blommaert was an independent landscape artist, and before the identification of many of his paintings in 1996, his work had often been attributed to Adriaen Bloemaert (c.1609-1666). Blommaert was born in 1626 in Middelburg, the capital of Zeeland. Like many of his colleagues, Blommaert pursued a second activity besides his profession as a painter, especially since the economic situation of many artists had deteriorated due to the outbreak of the war between England and the Netherlands in 1652. This economic struggle is evidenced by the fact that in 1675 he was summoned before the town treasurer of Middelburg to explain why he had not been paying property tax. Blommaert worked as a teacher, which accounts for the careful handwriting which also characterises his signature. This meticulousness is also revealed in his painting, particularly in the rendering of foliage and figural staffage in his landscapes. They provide evidence of the artist's individual style, which is independent of any specific models, although the predominately Italianate landscapes reveal the influence of Flemish precursors.

Provenance:

Collection of Joachim le Breton;
his daughter Mme Jules Cloquet;
her daughter Mme Henri Levesque;
her daughter Mme Paul Morin;
her son, member of the d'Arcet family.

Literature:

Marten Jan Bok and Marcel Roethlisberger, 'Not Adriaen Bloemaert but Abraham Blommaert (of Middelburg), Landscape Painter' in *Oud Holland* (vol. 110, 1996, pp. 12-34), no. 38.

Artist description:

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