

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



Jan Goeree (Middleburg 1670 - Amsterdam 1731)

Study for an Illustration to Jacob Cats' 'Eighty-Two Years Old'

pen and brown ink and two shades of brown wash, with touches of red wash, over black chalk,
indented and blackened on the reverse for transfer
13.8 x 14 cm (5³/₈ x 5¹/₂ in)

This dynamic and crowded composition is a design for an illustration by Jan Goeree for the 1712 edition of *The Complete Works of Mr. Jacob Cats*. The passage depicted here, from Cats' verse autobiography *Eighty-Two Years Old* relates how the author's ownership of a piece of polder land in Biervliet was the source of his fortune. In the foreground of the drawing, putti hold the coat of arms of Biervliet, a small fishing village in the Dutch province of Zeeland. Behind them is an image of soldiers from Biervliet, a reminder of their crucial role in the siege of Constantinople in 1204. The scene of military splendour is framed within a circle and adorned with further putti who hold a fishing net above their heads. A plaque resting above the frame is decorated with two fish and a gutting knife and surrounded by grape vines. Numerous allusions to fishing, the town's main industry, appear throughout the drawing. On the right, a market seller holds up a fish for a lady's inspection; on the left, a man points towards the vessels bobbing on the sea; in the foreground, a putto is absorbed in gutting a fish; a stealthy cat creeps around the corner of the crate to paw at the fish strewn on the ground.

Goeree's monumental style and show of pomp and theatricality, is similarly revealed in his design for a frontispiece entitled *An Allegory of the Decline of Classical Civilisation* (Private collection). Both works feature compositions tightly packed with figures and activity, and yet they achieve a sense of harmony and balance. Antiquity, the main subject matter of *An Allegory of the Decline of Classical Civilisation*, is also referenced through the multitude of putti that throng *Study for an Illustration to Jacob Cats' 'Eighty-Two Years Old'*, giving the work a degree of nobility and timelessness that no doubt would have pleased the book's author.

Jacob Cats (1577-1660) was a poet, moralist and statesman who is best remembered for his emblem books reflecting Calvinist philosophy. He studied law at Leiden and Orléans and became a successful lawyer specialising in witchcraft trials. While living in The Hague, he contracted a debilitating fever and for two years searched in vain for a cure, until he was mysteriously healed by a travelling doctor. During an interlude in the Eighty Years War, Cats and his brothers achieved great prosperity through draining and reclaiming land that had been flooded during the conflict, thus explaining his reference to the fortune he made in Biervliet. Cats became a prominent political figure in Middleburg and Dordrecht, serving as Grand Pensionary of Holland from 1636 to 1651, and was sent on at least two diplomatic missions to England. Cats was extremely popular and influential in his day, and his emblem books, poetry and autobiography were reprinted and translated repeatedly.

Goeree was a painter, draughtsman, engraver and etcher. He was the son of Willem Goeree, a Dutch art theorist who undertook a comprehensive survey of the various techniques necessary to make a great artist: drawing, architectural knowledge, perspective, anatomy, composition, imagination, colour and shading, all of which his son evidently mastered.

Provenance:

Sale, (E. van Aelst et al), Amsterdam, Paul Brandt, 24-28 November 1975, lot 698;
Jacobus A. Klaver, Amsterdam (bears his mark, not in Lugt, on the backing),
his sale, Amsterdam, Sotheby's, 10 May 1994, lot 103

Exhibitions

Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, *Tekeningen van oude meesters. De verzameling Jacobus A. Klaver*, 1993 (catalogue by Marijn Schapelhouman and Peter Schatborn), no. 101

Artist description:

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