SPHINX FINE ART



Thomas Wyck (Beverwijk near Haarlem 1616 - Haarlem 1677)

View of Italianate buildings on the banks of a river

signed in black chalk 'T Wijck' (lower left of verso)
point of the brush and grey wash over black chalk, within brown ink framing lines
13 x 16.5 cm (5 x 6½ in)

Viewof Italianate Buildings on the Banks of the River epitomises Thomas Wyck's evocative depictions of Mediterranean inspired scenery and architecture. Wyck executed drawing, paintings and etchings in the Italianate style, which was highly popular amongst seventeenth-century Dutch artists. He often portrayed backstreet views and courtyard scenes such as *An Italian Courtyard with a Gateway and Seated Figure*, as well as harbour scenes like the present one. His images reveal the keen attention he paid to what could have been regarded as mundane activities and commonplace people, giving them added resonance and significance.

Like many of his Dutch contemporaries, including Johannes Lingelbach, Abraham Storck and Jacob van der Ulft, Wyck depicted harbour scenes in varying degrees of accuracy, often embellishing his compositions with fanciful elements. While journeying through Italy sometime before 1640, Wyck is known to have made copious sketches in black chalk and wash, resembling this one, although his work is rarely dated so it is difficult to distinguish between what was completed on his actual travels or from memory. The biographer Arnold Houbraken recorded that he painted a number of views of harbours and markets populated with figures 'and behind the same showed large buildings and palaces drawn by himself from life in Italy'[1]. The seemingly hasty sketchiness of the present composition, and the atmospheric effects and employment of light and shadow, might suggest that the drawing was made on site. A similar range of buildings in a study by Wyck in the British Museum have been identified as the Ripa Grande in Rome[2]. In the present work, one notes the inclusion details such as the bottle sitting untouched on one of the barrels, that seems to have been included for artistic purposes rather than realism.

In the foreground of *Viewof Italianate Buildings on the Banks of the River*, stevedores await the arrival of a ship on which to load their crates and barrels. Sitting near them is a man in a black brimmed hat, suggesting that he is a merchant. The labourers are oriental in appearance, which is typical of Wyck's representations of figures working in international ports. Similar figures feature in *Italian Seaport*, a watercolour by Wyck, in The Courtauld Gallery. The compositional parallels in the two works are apparent, with both depicting a tall Italianate building on one side, backed by hills, and a stretch of water on the other, with goods assembled on the bank. *Italian Seaport*, perhaps more than *Viewof Italianate Buildings on the Banks of the River*, gives the impression of being a *capriccio* due to the romantically dilapidated state of the architecture.

Wyck spent the majority of his life in his native Haarlem, where he painted a number of works based on his preparatory studies from Rome. His pupils included Jan van der Vaardt and Jan Wyck, both of whom moved to London, where they established successful careers.

[1] A. Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, 1718–21, ii, pp. 16–17.

[2] A.M. Hind, *Catalogue of Drawings by Dutch and Flemish Artists preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, vol. IV, London 1931, p. 117, no. 6, reproduced plate LXVII.

Provenance:

A.W.M. Mensing, his sale, Amsterdam, Frederick Muller & Cie., 29 April 1937, lot 825;
J. Fred Bianchi, his sale, Amsterdam, Paul Brandt, 25 November 1964, lot 672.

Artist description:

Thomas Wyck, also known as Thomas Wijck, was a Flemish painter who was trained in Haarlem. He journeyed to Italy, presumably by 1640, the year in which a 'Tommaso fiammingo, pittore' (Thomas the Fleming, painter) is documented as residing in Rome in the Via della Fontanella. In 1642 Wijck was once again in the northern Netherlands, enrolled in Haarlem's Guild of St Luke. It is unlikely that the artist was again in Rome in the spring of 1644 (as Busiri Vici maintained), given the fact that on 22 May of that year he was married in Haarlem. His presence in his native city is further documented in 1658, 1659, 1669 and 1676.

Given the lack of dated works by Wyck, it is difficult to establish which paintings he executed in Rome, since even after his return to the Netherlands he painted Dutch Italianate themes, using black chalk and wash drawings done from life in Rome, a large number of which have survived. It is likely that the paintings most directly reflecting the work of northern artists active in Rome c. 1640 and those depicting the city's landscape with the greatest sense of immediacy and realism date from his Roman period and the years shortly thereafter. Works that can be dated to the 1640s include the *Viewof the Aracoeli* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), the *Market Place at the Portico d'Octavia* (private collection), the *Roman Courtyard with a Blacksmith* (private collection) and the *Washerwomen in a Courtyard* (Warsaw, National Museum), for which there is a preparatory drawing of a deserted courtyard (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Whatever Wyck's training, these paintings show that during his stay in Rome, Wijck was aware of the late works of Andries Both, such as Both's *Musicians in a Courtyard* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek). Wyck also harked back to the works of Pieter van Laer (Il Bamboccio), whose paintings were despatched regularly to Haarlem from Rome, so Wyck may have seen examples even before travelling to Italy. Through examples of van Laer's work, such as *Travellers in a Courtyard* (Florence, Uffizi) and *Flagellants* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), Wyck learnt to structure his characteristic views of courtyards and small squares framed, in the foreground, by archways and enclosed, in the background, by rooftops and loggias.

Wyck presented a ‘backstreet’ view of Rome, bereft of the great Classical and Renaissance monuments that were the main focus of attention for other Dutch Italianates and, more especially, for their northern clientele. It is rarely possible to identify specific locations in his works, but despite or perhaps because of this, Wyck’s views of the city, undoubtedly composed in the studio according to specific structural principles, seem more convincing and more realistic than those created by the Italianate artists of the second half of the 17th century. Scenes of Roman popular life crowded with small figures, so typical of the Bamboccianti (followers of van Laer), are of relatively little importance when compared with Wijck’s overwhelming interest in the urban setting. Yet some of Wijck’s paintings, for example the *Morra Players* (Vienna, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste) and the *Peasants in a Courtyard* (Philadelphia, PA, Museum of Arts), show strong connections with the *bambocciata* paintings (low-life scenes) of the early 1640s and in particular with the work of the so-called Master of the Small Trades, who may perhaps be identifiable with the young Jan Lingelbach.

There is a much greater concentration on landscape elements in paintings such as *Washerwomen* (Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum) and *Viewof the Ponte Molle* (Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum), which is partly based on an engraving of the same subject by Jan Both. A vital part of Thomas Wyck’s development as a landscape artist was undoubtedly the example set by Jan Asselijn, who was probably active in Rome between 1639 and 1643, and perhaps also that set by the much older artist Filippo Napoletano, who, in works such as the *Mill* (Florence, Pitti), had earlier displayed the same propensity for realism and the same method of structuring his compositions.
In the course of his travels in Italy Wyck probably also visited Naples. Though unconfirmed by documents, there are a number of views by his hand relating to the Gulf of Naples, for example the small and highly realistic *Viewof the Bay of Naples* (Naples, Causa private collection) and the imaginary views of harbours showing Mt Vesuvius and the Torre di S Vicenzo in the background with figures of travellers and exotic Orientals in the foreground (e.g. *Imaginary Viewof a Port*, Munich, Alte Pinakothek). These imaginary harbour and shore scenes enriched with picturesque figures were highly prized by 18th-century collectors and connoisseurs. Wijck’s example may have inspired other northern Italianates to enrich their thematic repertory with Neapolitan subjects.

In his last years Wyck produced works closely linked in style and subject-matter to Dutch genre painting. They are completely independent of his Italianate works, while still preserving some of the artist’s earlier compositional devices. Interior scenes with alchemists (e.g. Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum; Munich, Alte Pinakothek, 856) were typical of the artist according to Horace Walpole. Walpole also recalled the artist’s visit to London, during which he is said to have painted views of the city before the Great Fire of 1666 (e.g. Badminton House, Glos) and also depicted the fire itself (e.g. Chatsworth, Derbyshire). This journey probably took place between 1660 and 1668, a period during which Wyck is not recorded in his homeland.

Collections

Wyck is represented in the following collections: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen, France; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts, amongst others.