

SALOMON VAN RUYSDAEL

(Naarden 1600/03 - Haarlem 1670)

A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn

signed 'SVRUYSDAEL' (SVR linked, lower left)

oil on panel

61 x 73.7 cm (24 x 29 in)

Provenance: A.C. Wolfson, Esq., Parrock Hill House, Coleman's Hatch, Sussex, 1960;
with Douwes, Amsterdam.

IN THIS VIEW OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN SEVENTEENTH-century Netherlands, Salomon van Ruysdael has depicted a host of weary travellers gathered outside a popular rural inn. A horseman on a distinctive silver stallion converses with four other figures who sit in a horse-drawn trap. The trap's horses, as well as those attached to the adjacent wagon, are refreshing themselves from troughs. The entrance of the inn is filled with other colourful characters who mill about, taking the chance to stretch and recuperate before continuing on their journeys. A woman holding her barefooted child appears to be one of the gypsies who recur in much of van Ruysdael's work. On the right-hand side of the painting, another fully loaded trap and a lone horseman, accompanied by his faithful dog, have just left the inn to continue their journey. In the foreground, a goat stands by a pool of water around which chickens forage for food - their inclusion enhancing the sense of familiarity to the painting. A large portion of *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is also given over to the type of delicate depiction of an atmospheric cloudy sky at which van Ruysdael excelled.



Salomon van Ruysdael, *Halt at an Inn*, 1649,
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (Figure 1)

It was on account of his unembellished interpretations of the surrounding countryside that van Ruysdael gained a reputation amongst his contemporaries. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is an entirely naturalistic painting with figures clad in traditional clothes, posed in natural positions while travellers come and go to a roadside inn - its position clearly ensuring a good trade. As such, the work is typical of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting, which realistically depicted local culture without the intervention of any literary subject matter that was prevalent in other artistic schools. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is painted in a natural palette of greens and browns, with the occasional white highlight and splash of localised colour, characteristic of van Ruysdael's later works. It is also typical of his compositions of this genre, in which a rugged road stretches across the painting, with the illusion of space heightened by a darkened area in the left foreground, which contrasts with the intensely lit road.

The subject of a halt before an inn was one which van Ruysdael returned to repeatedly throughout his career, painting similar scenes at least thirty-eight times from 1631 to 1667, a typical example being *Halt at an Inn* of 1649 (fig. 1).¹ Although the landscape in *Halt at an Inn* is slightly more expansive than the one in the present work, they both share many of the features of van Ruysdael's best work. Once again, in one corner of the painting, figures are taking a rest on their journey and have stopped at the inn, in order to recuperate. In both works there are a range of figures who chat to each other, wait patiently or attend to the travellers and their animals. Again farmyard animals mill about amongst the figures and in both works these corners create charming genre scenes of seventeenth-century Dutch rural life. Both works also feature a diagonal composition with a road receding into the distant landscape. The flatness of the Dutch landscape is offset by the vertical nature of the rather spindly trees that rise elegantly into sky. Van Ruysdael's skill in conveying the lazy drift of clouds across a bright sky is again evident in *Halt at an Inn*, as is his use of splashes of red to enliven the cool palette of his landscapes, both features of the present work.

¹ Stechow, W., *Salomon van Ruysdael eine Einführung in Seine Kunst mit Kritischem Katalog der Gemälde*, (Berlin, 1938), cat. nos. 145-176.





Salomon van Ruysdael, *A Village Inn with Stagecoach*, 1655, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Figure 2)

Another example of this type of scene, for which van Ruysdael is so admired, is the Rijksmuseum's *A Village Inn with Stagecoach* (fig. 2). Amongst the group of figures outside the building is a figure on a bright white horse, a motif comparable to the one in *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*. A dark swathe of shadow sweeps across the foreground of both works, which creates a contrast with the predominant bright atmosphere of the scenes and serves as a *repoussoir* to the figural groups. The same compositional diagonal is again formed by the buildings, with which van Ruysdael cleverly guides the viewer's eye through the scene. In both works a few carefully composed trees catch the eye, and these distinctive features animate the landscape almost as much as the various figures.

Van Ruysdael's *Tavern with May Tree*, see figure 3, has more of an urban setting than *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* but the works have many comparable features. In addition to the characteristic features already discussed, such as the towering trees, the staffage and a beautiful study of a cloudy sky, *Tavern with a May Tree* has a small body of shallow foreground water comparable to the puddle in the present work in which the goat stands. Despite the small size of these respective pools of water they are beautifully depicted by van Ruysdael, showing his skill



Salomon van Ruysdael, *Tavern with May Tree*, 1664, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (Figure 3)

at capturing the subtle effects of light on water. The blues and whites are delicately reflected and contrast with the darker browns of the surrounding muddy ground.

The study of the reflection of a cloudy sky on an expanse of water, evident on a small scale in *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*, was one of the key features of much of van Ruysdael's work. In addition to the subject of travellers stopping outside an inn, many of his paintings are river views, examples being the Hermitage's *Ferry Boat near Arnheim* (1651, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg) and the Louvre's *Arrival of the Ferry* (fig. 4). Such river scenes are 'a harmony of air and water' painted in an almost monochromatic palette, the focus of which is the reflection of the cloudy sky on water.² In *Arrival of the Ferry* the composition is dominated by the still water and the sky, making the majority of the painting a study in reflections. Despite the very different subject matter, there are many other comparable features, such as the tall, thin trees, the travellers in the cart who wait for the ferry, and the skilful rendering of clouds drifting across the sky.



Salomon van Ruysdael, *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* (Detail)

Van Ruysdael predominantly painted these types of river views in the 1630s although in this period his first foray into the depiction of wagons stopping before buildings were painted. The following decade, however, he turned to the subject with a particular interest as he moved towards a statelier depiction of the Dutch countryside, that is often seen as representing a new 'classicising' period of Dutch landscape painting. This theme can be traced to the work of earlier Flemish landscapists, such as Jan Brueghel the Younger (1601-1678) (see inventory) but van Ruysdael adapted and developed the theme extensively. *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* is one of his most sophisticated treatments of the theme, with the inn playing a significant role and the compositional diagonal less insistent than in other examples.

The subject of the present work was also explored by van Ruysdael's contemporaries, such as Pieter de Molijn (1595-1661) (see inventory), whose painting *Halt at an Inn*, see figure 5, has many comparable aspects

² Fuchs, R. H., *Dutch Painting*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1978), p. 114

to *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*. In both works, a crowd of figures stand outside a remote, but busy, wayside inn. The variety of figures and animals capture the viewer's attention and provide flashes of colour to an otherwise restrained palette. Although the compositions have been reversed, a diagonal leads the eye from the foreground grouping across the paintings to where the background landscape opens up. The dark shadow in the foreground is also present in *Halt at an Inn*, and this device was in fact taken by van Ruysdael from de Molijn's work. Other features of de Molijn's painting, such as the tall, thin trees, which balance the flatness of the Dutch landscape, or the significant attention given to the depiction of the sky, are also comparable to *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*.

Van Ruysdael was born to a moderately wealthy cabinetmaker in Gooiland. Originally named Salomon de Gooyer, he adopted the name Ruysdael from Castle Ruisdael (or Ruisschendaal) near his father's home town. He moved to Haarlem, joining the Guild of St. Luke in 1623, and quickly established an excellent reputation among that city's artistic community for his unembellished depictions of the surrounding countryside. Although his teacher is unknown, his early works reveal the influence of Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630) (see inventory) and de Molijn. He was praised for paintings, such as *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn*, as early as 1628, when Samuel van Ampzing (1590-1632) described him as 'good at landscapes with small figures in them' in a section on famous Haarlem painters in his town history, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* ('Description and Praise of the Town of Haarlem'). During the 1630s van Ruysdael started to paint river scenes, and he became, together with de Molijn and Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) (see inventory), with whom he worked closely, one of the leading exponents of the 'tonal' phase of Dutch landscape painting in Haarlem. This movement brought an unprecedented naturalistic unity to landscapes through diagonal designs, atmospheric effects and a restricted ('monochromatic') palette of earth tones.

As his career progressed van Ruysdael's work became more varied, in terms of techniques, although he restricted himself to a narrow range of subject matter and, particularly after 1640, an easily identifiable style. Many of these changes were in accordance with the classicising developments of Dutch landscape painting in general, under the influence of Dutch Italianates such as Cornelis van Poelenburch (1594-1667) (see inventory) and Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657). In part, this was determined by the art market; once an artist had found a successful and popular style, he could repeat compositions and motifs endlessly. Nevertheless, despite the dangers of predictability, van Ruysdael's art always retains a sense of vitality and freshness and by the late 1640s he was one of the most important painters in Haarlem.

Like many Dutch painters, van Ruysdael also had an extra-artistic career; he was mentioned as a merchant in 1651, dealing in blue dye for Haarlem's bleacheries. He was a practicing Mennonite but held several offices in the local painters' Guild. His wife, Maycken Buysse, was buried in St Bavo's Church in Haarlem at Christmas 1660. He too was buried there in 1670. While van Ruysdael seems to have lived his entire life in Haarlem, topographical references in his landscape paintings suggest that he visited many places throughout the Netherlands, including Leiden, Utrecht, Amersfoort, Arnhem, Alkmaar, Rhenen and Dordrecht. In addition to landscapes, numerous river views, and seascapes, which all endeavor to capture the atmospheric conditions of the Dutch countryside, van Ruysdael



Salomon van Ruysdael, *Arrival of the Ferry*, 1635, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 4)

also painted a few still lifes. His son, Salomon van Ruysdael (c.1629/30-1681), also became a landscape painter and was heavily influenced by his father.

Although there is no documentary evidence, it is very possible that van Ruysdael also taught his nephew Jacob van Ruisdael (1638/9-1682). Certainly van Ruisdael's early work, such as *A Windmill near Fields* show his uncle's influence. As Seymour Slive says of this work, which van Ruisdael painted at the age of eighteen, 'the mother-of-pearl pink, blue, grey and white of the streaky clouds and late afternoon sky recall effects achieved' by his uncle.³ However, by the end of van Ruysdael's career it was his work that was being influenced by his nephew, as he included features such as a rocky foreground or a gnarled leafless tree.

Van Ruysdael was a highly accomplished painter and in works such as *A Wooded Landscape with Travellers by an Inn* his paintings came to encompass all that lovers of Dutch art admire - the ease of the subject matter, the scene's naturalistic appearance, and the attention to the effects of light and weather. Indeed, such works had a significant impact on the tradition of landscape painting in Haarlem and in many ways have come to represent the genre itself.



Pieter de Molijn, *Halt at an Inn*, 1657, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Figure 5)

³ Slive, S., *Jacob van Ruisdael: Master of Landscape*, exh. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2005, p. 40.