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EST. 1817

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Jacob Isaacsz. Van Ruisdael (Haarlem 1628 - 1682)

The 'Hekelveld', in Amsterdam in winter

Signed (lower left): 'JvRuisdael' (JvR in ligature)

Oil on canvas

19 ½ x 25 ⅝ in. (49.5 x 65 cm.)

Painted c.1665-70



Provenance

Purchased by John, 4th Marquess of Bute (1881-1947) and thence by descent to the current owner.

Exhibitions

Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, *Masterpieces from Mount Stuart. The Bute Collection*, 19 May – 2 December 2012, no. 17.

Literature

Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: A complete Catalogue of his Paintings, Drawings and Etchings*, New Haven / London 2001, no. 9.

The present work is a view of the Hekelveld in Amsterdam, looking south in the Nieuwezijdsvoorburgwal on the left and the Nieuwezijdsachterburgwal on the right. The latter canal was filled in when the Spuistraat was completed in 1867. The tower of Jan van Campen's Town Hall, completed in 1655, is on the skyline in the left distance. A new theme in the master's landscape repertoire, Ruisdael painted and drew cityscapes in the 1660s and 70s, notably sites in and around Amsterdam, including views of the Dam and Damrak (see, as examples, *View of the Damrak*, Frick Collection, New York, and *The Dam with the Weigh House in Amsterdam*, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, no. 885D) and panoramic vistas of the city and its harbour from the rooftop of the Town Hall (*Jacob van Ruisdael*, op. cit., The Hague, 1981-2, no. 46, illustrated).

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Ruisdael only painted about two dozen winter scenes and none is dated, but Jakob Rosenberg (*Jacob van Ruisdael*, Berlin, 1928, pp. 40 and 55) hypothesized that he had begun painting these subjects around 1655. Wolfgang Stechow (*Dutch Landscape Painting*, London, 1966, p. 96) further observed that works like his *Wooden Bridge* from the Heldring Collection, Oosterbeek (Slive, *op. cit.* p. 159, no. 145) seem to have in part inspired comparable winter scenes dated 1658 by Jan Beerstraten, such as *Muiden Castle in Winter*, National Gallery, London (no. 1314). With its monumental composition constructed around a tall central building, dramatic contrasts of light and shade, threatening sky and feathery treatment of details such as the new fallen snow, the present work may be compared to the *Village in Winter* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. A349; see Stechow 1966, fig. 191), which is usually dated to the early or mid-1660s (*Jacob van Ruisdael*, Exhibition Catalogue, Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1981-2 cat. 49, illustrated; and Slive, *op. cit.*, p. 469, no. 662). The present painting may have been executed a few years later. Points of comparison with its design and palette may also be made with the *Town in Winter*, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (no. 1745), and the *Canal with Commercial Buildings in Winter* in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid (no. 1934.19). However that work is considerably larger and betrays weaker passages which prompted Ivan Gaskell to suggest that it may have been executed with workshop assistance (*The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Seventeenth Flemish Painting*, 1989, cat. 100, illustrated).

Ruisdael's winter scenes often achieve a power and majesty which belie their intimate scale. As Stechow observed (W. Stechow, *The Winter Landscape in the History of Art*, Criticism, 1, 1960, pp. 487-8 and *op. cit.*, 1966, pp. 96-7), these landscapes constitute the culmination of the winter scene as a painting type in Dutch art. They eschew the gaiety of earlier works by Hendrick Avercamp and Aert van der Neer, the milder climes of van Goyen, as well as the elegance of Jan van de Cappelle, seeking instead an unprecedented grandeur and drama. Yet, notwithstanding such details as the strong shaft of light which brightens the gabled brick buildings on the left, contrasting so forcefully with the deep and velvety moleskin grey shadows on the right, Ruisdael's winter scenes are never grandiloquent or theatrical. Their glowering mood is nature's own, not the romantic projection of man. Despite its solemn majesty, this powerfully unremitting image of urban chill includes amidst the figures who trudge home over frozen canals several representatives of winter landscape's favourite and most time-honoured staffage – children tossing snowballs and a lady who has lost not only her milking pail, but also her dignity as she tumbles to the ice.