VP5050

PHILIPS WOUWERMAN
(1619 – Haarlem - 1668)

A Hunter mounting his Horse

Signed with interlinked monogram, lower right,
on a rock: *PHIL W*
Oil on panel, 9½ x 12⅞ ins. (24.1 x 32.7 cm)

PROVENANCE
Anonymous sale; Hôtel Drouot, Nantes, 13 June 1996
With Richard Green, London
Dimitri Mavrommatis, London
Sotheby's, London, 5 December 2007, lot 42
Private Collection, USA, until 2023
Anon. sale, Christie's, New York, 27 January, 2023, lot 224.

LITERATURE
Gazette de l'Hôtel Drouot, 21 June 1996, pp. 159-160.

Philips Wouwerman was the most successful seventeenth-century Dutch painter of equestrian scenes. During the course of his career he developed a wide repertoire of themes to demonstrate his virtuosity at rendering horses. His subjects include simple, unpretentious scenes of farriers, stables, riding schools and travellers at rest, as well as larger, multi-figured compositions of hunting parties, country fairs, army encampments and cavalry battles. He was unusually prolific and, despite a relatively short career, left an oeuvre numbering nearly six hundred paintings. According to his biographer Arnold Houbraken he died a rich man.

In this painting from his early career, Wouwerman depicted a hunter mounting his horse before setting off on a day's hunting. He holds the reins and a tuft of mane in one hand, while gripping the back of the saddle with the other. One of his feet is planted on a large stone, serving as a mounting block, from which he launches himself into the saddle. Another man, viewed from behind, assists him by pulling down on the stirrup on the opposite side to prevent the saddle from slipping round. A hunting bag and horn lie on the ground, and a pair of dogs waits patiently nearby. On the left, a peasant family can be seen resting by the side of the road in the shade of some trees. On the right, an Italianate landscape, veiled in the mist of early morning, extends into the far distance.

Like the vast majority of Wouwerman's paintings, *A Hunter mounting his Horse* is undated, however, its style suggests an early date, probably around late 1646 or slightly later. Judging from a cluster of dated paintings from the mid-1640s, we can recognise such characteristic features of these years as the low vantage point, diagonally structured composition and the concentration on just a few animals and human figures seen close-up on rising ground. Also consistent with this period is the form of signature. Between about 1642 and 1646 Wouwerman signed his work with the monogram 'PH.W', but after that he lengthened it to 'PHIL. W', as is the case here, or 'PHILS.W'. A comparison can be made with a similarly composed, signed and dated painting of 1645, depicting *Hunters at Rest*, in the Mauritshuis, in The Hague (Fig. 1). However, the greater development of the landscape and the richer, more Italianate palette evident here point to a slightly later date than the painting in The Hague.

During this early phase of Wouwerman's career, the main influence on his art was that of fellow townsman Pieter Van Laer (1599-after 1642), who had returned to Haarlem in 1639 after a fifteen-year stay in Rome. Van Laer's scenes of Roman street life, which became known as *bambocciate* after van Laer's nickname 'Bamboccio' (clumsy figure), created a new genre that soon became popular both in Italy and in the Netherlands. According to Houbraken, Wouwerman got hold of a number of van Laer's sketches and studies after his death, but apparently had them destroyed when he was on his deathbed in order to protect his own reputation[i]. Whether or not Houbraken's account is true, Wouwerman undoubtedly drew inspiration from van Laer's street scenes, as well as from the older artist's landscapes and paintings of robberies and travellers resting at an inn. The horses in Wouwerman's early paintings in particular recall those of Van Laer both in their sturdy conformation and in the way in which they move. After 1650, Wouwerman increasingly replaced the naturalism of the horses in his early paintings with horses modelled on graceful, high-stepping Arab types.

Fig. 1. Philips Wouwerman, *Resting Hunters*, signed and dated 1645, The Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 222.

Wouwerman repeated the motif of a hunter mounting his horse in a larger, more ambitious painting entitled *A Stop at an Inn*, now in Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid[ii]. Although the work in Madrid dates from somewhat later in the mid-1650s, the artist likely worked from drawings observed at first-hand and held in his studio.

BIOGRAPHY

The eldest son of the painter Pauwels Joostsz. Wouwerman, Philips was baptised in Haarlem on 24 May 1619. His younger brothers, Pieter (1623-1682) and Johannes (1629-1666), also became artists and painted in the style of Philips. Wouwerman probably took his first instruction in painting from his father. According to Cornelis de Bie, he subsequently became a pupil of Frans Hals (1582-1666), but there is no trace of Hals's influence in his work. In 1638, against the wishes of his family, Wouwerman travelled to Hamburg to marry a Catholic girl named Annetje Pietersdr. van Broeckhof. While in Hamburg, he worked briefly in the studio of the obscure German history painter Evert Decker. By 1640, he had returned to Haarlem where he joined the guild. In 1646, he served as a member of the guild's executive committee (as *vinder* or agent). He seems to have remained in Haarlem for the rest of his life. He died on 19 May 1668 and was buried in the Nieuwe Kerk in Haarlem. His wife survived him by less than two years and was interred in St. Bavo's Church on 24 January 1670.

Though he lived to be only forty-eight, Wouwerman was one of the most prolific and successful artists of the Dutch Golden Age. He occasionally painted *staffage* in the landscapes of Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682), Jan Wijnants (1632-1684) and Cornelis Decker (1618-1678). He had numerous pupils and followers and died a wealthy man, leaving a substantial inheritance to his three sons and four daughters. During the eighteenth century, he became one of the most highly esteemed Dutch painters in Europe: indeed no princely collection was complete without one of his paintings.

---

[i] A. Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols, Amsterdam, 1718-21, vol. 2, p. 75.

[ii] Philips Wouwerman, *A Stop at an Inn*, signed PHILS.w, oil on canas, 61 x 73 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P002152.