



AELBERT CUYP

(Dordrecht, 1620 - Dordrecht, 1691)

A wooded river landscape

monogrammed on mount (recto): *J:B.*; inscribed on mount (recto): *A. Cuyp.*; collector's mark on mount (verso): *J:B. No:880. / 7 ½ by 5 ½* [L.1420]

black chalk and grey wash

133 x 193 mm

Provenance:

John Barnard (1709-1784), London [L.1420]

His posthumous sale, Mr Greenwood, London: 16–24 February 1787, sixth night's sale, Lot 46

Where acquired by "Pileau"

Private collection, UK

Aelbert Cuyp's name is now virtually synonymous with Dutch landscape art in the 17th century. Indeed, his working life almost exactly corresponds to the period 1640 to 1665 known as the Golden Age. The present drawing can be dated to 1640–42. Here we see a river cutting through a tree-filled vista near the outskirts of Dordrecht, Cuyp's native city. At this early point in his career, he drew and painted pure landscapes, influenced perhaps by Jan van Goyen. The scene contains no hint of man's agency; it was Cuyp's vision that the power of nature alone could provide a narrative for his work, a stance that prefigures the Romantic movement in Europe and the United States in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. His drawings, especially, live up to this maxim, sometimes containing a rustic cottage or a distant church spire, rarely a human figure.

Cuyp often produced drawings in sketchbook series. None of these survive in their entirety, but they can be reconstructed partially on the basis of the paper type he used, the watermarks, the size of the sheets, drying folds, and recurring marks. Our drawing belongs to a group of around twenty-five sheets of approximately the same size, 14 x 19 cm, known as the 'Environs of Dordrecht Group'. Almost all are executed in the same media as the present design, with gum arabic sometimes added to emphasise the darks in the foreground. Other drawings from the group are in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and the Städel in Frankfurt.

This is one of eighteen drawings by Cuyp that belonged to John Barnard (1709-1784), one of Britain's most esteemed collectors. When his collection of around 1,100 sheets was dispersed at auction in London in 1787, the catalogue stated "that a more capital collection ... were never offered to the Public, or more worthy the Attention of the learned Connoisseurs". Writing a century and a half later, Frits Lugt reaffirmed the sentiment: "Barnard's mark is the most revered of all English marks. This is because the perfect taste of this collector was almost never wrong, and so his initials are an excellent guarantee of authenticity". Barnard held Cuyp in the highest regard and was also the owner of paintings by the artist. Barnard's Cuyp drawings are now dispersed among the principal museums of the world, including the Musée du Louvre, Paris, the British Museum, London, the Fitzwilliam, Cambridge, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Auction records reveal that the drawing was acquired at Barnard's sale by a certain "Pileau", who bought three drawings at the sale and about whom nothing more is known.

A comparable drawing by Cuyp from the collection of Eberhard W. Kornfeld recently sold at Galerie Kornfeld, Bern.