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GILLIS NEYTS
(Ghent 1623-1687 Antwerp)

A WINTER CITYSCAPE OF ANTWERP, 1666

Signed and dated lower left: "g. nyts. f. 1666".
Oil on panel.
54 x 86 cm; 21 1/4 x 33 7/8 in.

Provenance

Sale Fievez, Brussels (16 June 1931), lot 113;
Sale of the F. Stuyck Collection, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts (7-8 December 1960), lot 91;
Galerie P. de Boer, Amsterdam (1961) no. 54;
Laboratoria Tupens, Sint-Niklaas (?);
With Rafael Valls, London;
With De Jonckheere, from whom acquired by the present owner.

Literature:

P. Gustot, *Gillis Neyts. Un paysagiste brabançon en vallée mosane au XVII^e siècle*, Namurois 2008, p. 69, no. P13, reproduced.

Exhibited

Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, *Le siècle de Rubens*, 15 October - 12 December 1965, no. 157, reproduced.

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Gillis Neyts' *A Winter Cityscape of Antwerp* captures the complex nature of the artist's idyllic landscape paintings as he employs the techniques of his work as a draftsman to blend Flemish and Dutch influences. This painting depicts the light-hearted revelry of a winter's day off the banks of Antwerp where a gentle sunlight rests along the low horizon. Scattered across the frozen Scheldt are quintessential scenes of daily life: children skating, pairs sledding, and galleons frozen between the banks. From Neyts' perspective on the eastern bank, the peaks of St. Walburga's Church, Our Lady's Cathedral, St. Michael's Abbey, and St. Andrew's Church rise through the wintery air.¹

The cool, even illumination of the scene is characteristic of Neyts' painting style. Although more often thought of as a draftsman, the Flemish artist employs the mastery of shade and light needed for success as an engraver to his landscape paintings. In these works, primarily idealized scenes of Flemish landscapes, the artist uses delicate lighting effects to highlight the fine details of his figures. In *A Winter Cityscape*, Neyts captures the final glowing moments of the evening as the thin lines of boat rigging and reaching branches of undergrowth turn white with reflecting sunlight. While such precision and luminousness imbue his works with a Dutch feel, the Italianate blue-green hue of the receding hills is distinctly Flemish.

Neyts' displays his experience as an engraver in the textured presentation of the foreground foliage and background hills. The short brushstrokes capture the naturalism of the plants and the interplay of the weak winter light across the distant mountains. The trees especially are exemplary representations of the highly textured style displayed in Neyts' engravings (Fig. 1). Such an interest in botanical accuracy attests to the artist's Flemish influences.

It is widely accepted that Neyts' began his artistic career under the Antwerp painter and draftsman Lucas van Uden. After Neyts' marriage in Antwerp in 1643 and his registration into Antwerp's Guild of Saint Luke in 1647, however, the artist's presence in the city is unknown. A year before the completion of the present work, in 1665, Neyts was working in Namur. He likely returned to Antwerp around 1680 and remained in the city until his death in 1687.²

¹ P. Gustot, *Gillis Neyts. Un paysagiste brabançon en vallée mosane au XVIIe siècle*, Namurois 2008, p. 69.

² See *Le siècle de Rubens*, 1965, p. 144

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While a number of his landscape drawings are now in the collections of the British Museum (Fig. 1), the Louvre, and the Rijksmuseum (Fig. 2), there are significantly fewer of Neyts' landscape paintings in circulation. A drawing of a similar view from the eastern bank of the Scheldt is currently held in the collection of the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp (Fig. 3). Less common still are signed paintings like the present *A Winter Cityscape*: for example, in his *View of Antwerp from the Opposite Bank of the Scheldt*, also monogrammed and dated, Neyts' centers the more vibrant, Flemish composition on a grounded vessel (Fig. 4). Recently sold at Kunstgalerij De Vuyst in Lokeren, the artist's *Landscape with the Antwerp Cathedral* provides a scene presented in a similarly vibrant Flemish palette (Fig. 5). Many of Neyts' landscape paintings are nonetheless more traditionally Flemish with saturated colors and mythical scenes (Fig. 6), *A Winter Cityscape* presents an intimate and rare glimpse into the artist's everyday life in Antwerp.

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Fig. 1. Gillis Neyts, *Landscape with a little wooden bridge over a river and trees to the right*, 1638-1687, etching on paper.
London, British Museum.

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Fig. 2. Gilles Neyts, *View of Lille*, 1643-1681, etching on paper.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

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Fig. 3. Gillis Neyts, *View of Antwerp from the East Side*, c. 1648, drawing on parchment. Antwerpen, Museum Plantin-Moretus.

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Fig. 4. Gillis Neyts, *View of Antwerp from the Opposite Bank of the Scheldt*, 1638-1687, oil on panel. Private collection.

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Fig. 5. Gillis Neyts, *Landscape with Antwerp Cathedral*, 1681, oil on canvas.
Sold at Kunstgalerij De Vuyst, Lokeren, 2 March 2019, lot 4

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Fig. 6. Gillis Neyts, *Landscape with Venus and Adonis*, 1647-1687, oil on panel.
York Art Gallery.