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Matthijs Schoevaerdt

*A village landscape, with the procession of the Easter
and*

A landscape with alms being distributed before a ruined abbey

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MATTHIJS SCHOEVAERDTS

(Brussels c. 1665 – after 1702)

A VILLAGE LANDSCAPE, WITH THE PROCESSION OF THE EASTER OX

and

A LANDSCAPE WITH ALMS BEING DISTRIBUTED BEFORE A RUINED ABBEY

Oil on oak panel

Each 34 x 50 cm ; 13 3/8 x 19 1/2 in.

Provenance

Baron Jean-Henri de Brouwer (1872-1951), Le Manoir de Ville-Pommeroeul, Belgium;

His sale, Keyaerts, Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 6 October, 1947, lots 51 & 52 (as by Jean-Louis Demarne);

Anon. sale, Sotheby's, London, 3 December 1997, lot 108 (as Matthijs Schoevaerds);

Spink-Leger, Old Bond Street, London, 1998;

Private collection, United Kingdom, until present.

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In this pendant pair of paintings, Schoevaerdt has depicted picturesque scenes of everyday life. In one, the village green provides the setting for the annual procession of the Easter Ox, staged by the Butchers' Guild. The festival took place in the week before Easter, on the day of the guild's patron saint, St. Luke, whose symbol was the winged ox. The guild's prized beast, decorated with ribbons and floral garlands, was paraded through the town, preceded by pipers and drummers, and followed by singing and dancing members of the guild and townsfolk. Later, the animal was butchered and the meat served at the guild dinner, with a portion being donated to the church and the poor of the town. This tradition gave rise to the saying, "The guild ox is on parade", meaning "this will be a real feast". In its companion piece, alms are being distributed to the poor before the ruins of an abbey. Peasants with their animals rest by the roadside, while several gentlemen pass by on horseback. Both paintings contain distant views of hazy, blue mountains.

Schoevaerdt's oeuvre consists mainly of views of villages, towns, ports and Italianate scenes, crowded with animated little figures and animals. These belong to a landscape tradition initiated by Jan Brueghel the Elder in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Such was the taste and public demand for small, decorative landscapes of this kind that the tradition remained alive for a long time. Profiting from this demand, painters both in Antwerp and in Brussels continued working in an archaic style well into the eighteenth century. Most of the subjects treated by Jan Brueghel remained popular during this period, only mythologies and allegories were gradually dropped from the repertoire. Although to some extent the early seventeenth-century style was modified by current artistic trends, the essential features of the landscape type conceived by Jan "Velvet" Brueghel remained true to its origins.

This pair of small panels is characteristic of Schoevaerdt's finely-painted, colourful scenes, filled with anecdotal details. As we see here, prominence is often given to architectural motifs, a trait which distinguishes him from his master Adriaen-Frans Baudewijns (1644-1711). In most other respects his style is very similar, indeed, his work is often confused with that of Baudewijns and his oft-times collaborator Pieter Bout (1658-1719). Also typical of Schoevaerdt is the rich palette of blues, greens and golden browns, with accents of red, yellow and blue in the figures' clothing.

Very little is known about the life of Matthijs Schoevaerdt. It is assumed that he was born in Brussels around 1665, since he was apprenticed to Adriaen-Frans Baudewijns in 1682. He was admitted to the Brussels Guild of St. Luke as a Master on 28 September 1690 and served as dean of the guild from 1692 to 1696. Since his latest works are dated 1702, one can conclude that he died sometime after that date. A document from 1712 states that he was dead by then. His brother Frans and his nephew Pieter were also painters.

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