Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Jan de BISSCHOP (Amsterdam 1628 - The Hague 1671)

A Hillside and Trees, near The Hague

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with framing lines in brown ink.
Inscribed by the artist Buyten den Haegh bij Dorpen laen. on the verso.
102 x 155 mm. (4 x 6 1/8 in.)

A particularly fine and attractive example of Jan de Bisschop's mature draughtsmanship, the present sheet was drawn near The Hague, according to the artist's inscription on the verso. De Bisschop had settled in The Hague in 1652, serving as a lawyer at the court of the Stadtholder. In his spare time, he made numerous drawings of views in The Hague and the surrounding countryside, and, particularly in the 1660s, frequently drew in the Haagse Bos, the extensive woodland that was part of the city. A splendid example of the artist's luminous wash drawings of the 1660s, this very freely executed sheet is, in many ways, reminiscent of the drawings of such noted contemporaries as Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, whose drawings de Bisschop may have seen in Breenbergh's studio.

Provenance:

Sale, Foster's, 23 October 1929 [catalogue untraced]
Purchased from Crook in 1929 by A. Paul Oppé, London
Thence by descent.

Literature:

London, Royal Academy of Arts, The Paul Oppé Collection, 1958, no.437.

Artist description:

Trained as a lawyer, Jan de Bisschop set up a legal practice in The Hague from 1652, and continued to work in the legal profession throughout his life. He was, however, also active as a talented amateur draughtsman and printmaker, and is much better known today as such. He may have been self-taught as an artist, although it is likely that he also studied in the mid-1640s with Bartholomeus Breenbergh, who certainly had a profound effect on his manner of drawing. (As William Robinson has noted, 'Breenbergh must have taught him to exploit the contrast of the washes and reserved areas of paper to evoke spatial depth and convey the effect of bright sunlight and rich, subtly gradated shadows.') De Bisschop was a friend of his fellow amateur artist Constantijn Huygens the Younger, and like him

developed a new approach to drawing, with broadly drawn landscapes in wash. He also produced portrait drawings, genre subjects and copies after paintings and sculpture by earlier Italian or Netherlandish artists, as well as numerous Italianate views, although he never seems to have actually travelled to Italy. Much of the last years of his career were spent in the production of a series of prints after antique sculpture, published as Signorum veterum icones in 1669, and another set of etchings after drawings by Italian artists, which appeared, under the title Paradigmata Graphices variorum artificium, in 1671, the year of his death from tuberculosis. After his death, many of de Bisschop's Italianate drawings seem to have been acquired by his fellow artist Jacob van der Ulft (1627-1689), who is known to have copied many of them.

Jan de Bisschop's earliest extant drawings date from 1648, the same year that he began his law studies in Leiden, and include views of Amsterdam and Bergen op Zoom. He produced a large number of landscape drawings between the late 1640s and the 1660s, mainly of views around Leiden and The Hague, and often inscribed his drawings on the verso with topographical notes. (He also often signed his drawings with a Latinized version of his name, as 'Johannes Episcopius'.) As a draughtsman, he worked mainly with pen and brush, producing drawings characterized by a distinctive tone of reddish-brown wash, perhaps achieved by the mixing of copper red with black (India) ink, which came to be known as 'biscchops-inkt', or 'Bisschop's ink'. From the beginning of his artistic career, he adopted Breenbergh's method of using the white of the paper as a source of bright light, against which shadows were applied with a brush. In his seminal 1971 study of the drawings of Jan de Bisschop, whom he aptly describes as 'one of the most productive of the seventeenth-century amateur artists and one of the most acute observers of sunlight in Holland', Jan Gerrit van Gelder notes that, 'Drawings by De Bisschop which have seldom or never been exposed to the light still show a strong effect of light and shade, with a surprising amount of gradation in the shadows.'

De Bisschop's landscape drawings are also characterized by a refined treatment of the subject. As Robinson notes of the artist, 'In the preface to Pardigmata Graphices, he explicitly deplores the unmediated naturalism of Dutch art, including the "tumbledown buildings" and "bare, crooked, misshapen trees" that feature in landscapes by his compatriots. His choice of motifs reflects his preference for a stately, harmonious landscape art.'

The surviving corpus of drawings by de Bisschop is thought to number over five hundred sheets. That his drawings were popular with collectors well into the 18th century is seen in the fact that the noted collector of drawings Valerius Röver, who died in 1739, owned more than eighty landscape sketches by the artist, while an album of 140 drawings by de Bisschop, mainly after classical sculptures and reliefs, once belonged to Cornelis Ploos van Amstel and Horace Walpole, among others, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.