

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jean-Baptiste DE NOTER (Walem 1786 - Mechelen 1855)

A View of the Domein Vorschenborg near Mechelen

Pen and black ink and watercolour, over an underdrawing in pencil.

Signed and dated J B A De Noter del 1827 at the lower left.

485 x 603 mm. (19 1/8 x 23 3/4 in.) [sight]

The present sheet depicts, in the distance, a view of the city of Mechelen, situated between Brussels and Antwerp. Prominent architectural features including the distinctive tower of St. Rumbold's Cathedral and the domed Basilica of Our Lady of Hanswijk are easily recognizable at the top of the composition.

The vast majority of the composition, however, is taken up with an overhead view of a large park with canals, wooded areas and gardens and a small pond or lake, as well as a formal garden and a castle. This is the country estate of Vorschenborg, the property of the Brabant nobleman Jean-Ernest-Guillaume-Xavier Coloma (1747-1825), Baron of Sint-Pieters-Leeuw.

De Noter's watercolour views of this type were usually not intended to be topographically accurate, since the artist often preferred to emphasize the grandeur and beauty of the property. Filled with charming anecdotal details, this large watercolour of the Coloma estate depicts a castle at the lower right, situated between the formal French garden and the lake, which is overlooked by a small mill at its tip. De Noter has chosen not to depict the Leuven-Dijle Canal, which ran alongside the property, although he does show the bridge which crossed the canal, seen here on a diagonal near the top right of the composition, along with the buildings on the Tervursesteenweg - the main road from Mechelen to Brussels - along the right edge of this view.

Situated to the south of Mechelen, the estate of Vorschenborg had for several generations belonged to the Berthout family, Lords of Grimbergen and Mechelen. In the 16th century it was home to a number of gunpowder mills, but by the early 17th century it had been transformed into a pleasure garden, and was later used by a monastic order. Much of the land was expropriated when the Leuven-Dijle Canal was built between 1750 and 1752. In 1782 the property was acquired by Ernest Coloma, Baron of Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, who laid out the landscape gardens in an English style and also added the more formal enclosed French garden. After Coloma's death in 1825 the land was turned into a public park, and in 1846 it was acquired by a Catholic girl's school. The small castle was demolished and replaced by a

larger Neoclassical structure that was destroyed by bombing during the Second World War, along with much of the surrounding grounds.

Descended from a 16th century Catalan family, Jean-Ernest Coloma was a highly influential figure in Mechelen and a noted patron of the arts and sciences. He was a noted collector of paintings, drawings, sculptures, scientific instruments, maps and musical instruments, and also assembled an extensive library. The posthumous sale of his library and collections in September 1825 included twelve landscape watercolours and one portrait print by Jean-Baptiste de Noter. (Coloma had also commissioned de Noter to make a watercolour copy of the second earliest known map of Mechelen, by the late 16th century cartographer and surveyor Jan van Hanswijk.) However, as the present sheet was executed two years after Coloma's death, it was unlikely to have been directly commissioned by him.

A similar bird's-eye view by Jean-Baptiste de Noter – a panoramic watercolour of the city of Ghent as it was in 1540, derived from a painting by the 16th century Flemish painter Lucas de Heere – appeared at auction in Belgium in 2020.

Artist description:

A Belgian painter and draughtsman known for cityscapes, interiors, urban views and studies of buildings, Jean-Baptiste (Jan Baptist) André de Noter was the son of the Mechelen architect Pierre-François de Noter. He seems to have studied with his father and was also a pupil of Pieter Verhulst at the Municipal Academy for Arts in the city of Mechelen. At the age of eighteen, Jean-Baptiste moved to Ghent to join his elder brother, the painter Pierre-François de Noter the Younger. He lived and worked in Ghent for nearly two decades, earning a living from the sale of his architectural drawings and watercolours, and in 1822 he returned to Mechelen, where he was to spend the remainder of his career. Many of his cityscapes of Ghent and Mechelen were of a historical nature, and were often based in old maps or paintings. Indeed, many of the buildings so carefully depicted by the artist no longer survived. Among his most important patrons was a Canon Schöffers, who commissioned de Noter to paint 340 watercolours of the buildings and gardens of Mechelen and the surrounding area. Purchased by the city in 1878, the Schöffers collection is now housed in the Mechelen City Archives, and serves as a valuable record of how the city appeared in the early 19th century; many of these watercolours were later reproduced in the book *Mechelen zoals J. B. de Noter het zag* (Mechelen as Seen by J. B. de Noter) by the Flemish historian Jan Neckers, published in 1980. De Noter also earned the occasional public commission, such as painting new stage sets for the city theatre of Mechelen in 1833. His son David de Noter was also an artist.