

PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT BRITISH PRIVATE COLLECTION

15

PAULUS POTTER

(ENKHUIZEN 1625-1654 AMSTERDAM)

Landscape with cattle and a woman cleaning a bucket by a stream

signed and dated 'Paulus Potter f. / 1647' (upper right)
oil on panel
16¾ x 14¾ in. (42.5 x 37.5 cm.)

£2,000,000-3,000,000
US\$2,700,000-4,000,000
€2,300,000-3,400,000

PROVENANCE:

Johan van der Marck Aegidiusz. (1707-1772), Leiden, from whom acquired 'for a large sum of money' by the following (see Priem, *op. cit.*, p. 144, note 103), with Pierre Rémy (d. after 1787) and Jacques François Boileau (1720-1785), Paris, from whom acquired by the following, Étienne François, Marquis de Stainville, duc de Choiseul (1719-1785), Paris. Louis-François de Bourbon, Prince de Conti (1717-1776), Paris; his sale (†), Palais du Temple, Paris, 21 April 1777 (=14th day), lot 372, where acquired for 10,900 livres by the following, Achille Joseph Robert de Lignerac, duc de Caylus (c. 1733-1783), Paris, with Alexandre Joseph Paillet (1743-1814), Paris, by whom entrusted to the following to sell in 1811, with Louis Bernard Coclers (1741-1817), Amsterdam, from whom acquired through Jeronimo de Vries on 11 June 1811 for 8,001 Dutch guilders by the following, Lucretia Johanna van Winter (1785-1845), Amsterdam, whose collection was merged into the Six van Hillegom-van Winter collection upon her marriage in 1822 to Hendrik Six van Hillegom (1790-1847), and by descent to their sons, Jan Pieter Six van Hillegom (1824-1899) and Pieter Hendrik Six van Vromade (1827-1905), and by descent; Frederik Muller & Cie., Amsterdam, 16 October 1928, lot 36 (78,000 florins to J. van Wisselingh), illustrated. Acquired shortly afterwards by Charles Peto Bennett (1856-1940) (m. Kristine Elisabeth 'Kiss' Gudde), and by descent to his son, Alfred Edwin Peto Bennett (1905-1996), and by descent to the present owners.

EXHIBITED:

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Catalogus der verzameling schilderijen en familie-portretten van de heeren Jhr. P.H. Six van Vromade, Jhr. Dr. J. Six, en Jhr. W. Six wegens verbouwing in het Stedelijk Museum van Amsterdam tentoongesteld*, 1900, no. 112.

LITERATURE:

P.F. Basan, ed., *Recueil d'estampes gravées d'après les tableaux du cabinet de Monseigneur le Duc de Choiseul*, Paris, 1771, unpaginated, no. 9.
C. Hofstede de Groot, *A catalogue raisonné of the works of the most eminent Dutch painters of the seventeenth century based on the work of John Smith*, London, 1912, IV, p. 623, no. 80, with the provenance incorrectly listing the picture in the 1772 sale of the duc de Choiseul.
C. Blanc, *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles: École hollandaise*, II, Paris, 1861, p. 15.
T. van Westrheene, *Paulus Potter: sa vie et ses oeuvres*, M. Nijhoff, 1867, p. 151, no. 15.
F. Cundall, *The Landscape and Pastoral Painters of Holland: Ruisdael, Hobbema, Cuijp, Potter*, Marston, 1891, p. 170.
G. Lafenestre and E. Richtenberger, *La peinture en Europe, catalogues raisonnés des oeuvres principales conservées dans les musées, collections, édifices civils et religieux... La Hollande*, Paris, circa 1900, p. 329, illustrated on the previous page.
A. Walsh, *Paulus Potter Paintings, Drawings and Etchings*, The Hague, 1994, p. 95, under no. 14, illustrated.
R. Priem, 'The "Most Excellent Collection" of Lucretia Johanna van Winter: The Years 1809-22, with a Catalogue of the Works Purchased' and 'Catalogue of Old Master Paintings Acquired by Lucretia Johanna van Winter, 1809-22', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, XXV, nos. 2/3, 1997, pp. 142-45 and 191, fig. 45; and Appendix II, pp. 208-209, no. 31, as 'the most expensive purchase that Lucretia would ever make for her collection'.
S. Avery-Quash, 'The Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake', *The Walpole Society*, LXXIII, 2011, p. 556.

ENGRAVED:

B.A. Dunker (1746-1807), 1770.
Jacques Couché (1750-1832).





Fig. 1 Paulus Potter, *Landscape with cattle and a woman cleaning a bucket by a stream*, c. 1647, black chalk, heightened with white, on laid paper © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Paulus Potter was one of the most significant painters of the Dutch Golden Age. From early in his career, in around 1643, the artist focused almost exclusively on painting works which made animals their primary focus and subject. This immaculately preserved painting is a consummate example of Potter's best work in the genre, combining scrupulous observation of the anatomy of the cattle with richly detailed renditions of texture and vivid effects of soft, glowing sunlight. The painter's career was cut short tragically by his early death in 1654, at the age of 28. With an especially distinguished provenance, this is arguably the finest painting by the artist still in private hands, unseen in public and untraced since the last time it was sold at auction in 1928.

Relatively little is known about Potter's training, though his early works betray the influence of the Amsterdam history painter Claes Moeyaert and it is possible that Potter thus spent time in his workshop. In May 1642, the painter Jacob de Wet recorded in a sketchbook that he had been paid 8 *point* by Potter to study painting with him for a year. The duration of this recorded training, however, suggests that Potter had already completed an apprenticeship (which typically lasted three years in the Netherlands) and was working as a journeyman painter. The first mention of Paulus Potter as an independent master is the record of his entry into the Guild of Saint Luke in Delft on 6 August 1646, though he probably had been working independently for a few years before this date. By 1649, however, he had relocated to The Hague, where he rented a house on the Dunne Bierkade canal from Jan van Goyen. Finding increasing popularity with wealthy and important patrons in the Netherlands, including Amalia of Solms-Braunfels (1602-1675), Princess consort of Orange, Potter moved to Amsterdam in 1652 at the invitation of the famed surgeon Nicolaes Tulp (subject of the eponymous *Anatomy Lesson* by Rembrandt).

While the earliest known works by Potter are history paintings, after 1643, he increasingly focused his attentions on the countryside of the Netherlands. The emergence of greater naturalism in his works and his more focused subject matter were perhaps inspired initially by the Haarlem painter and etcher Gerrit Claesz Bleker. In around 1640, Bleker had published a series of four etchings depicting herdsmen and their livestock, constituting some of the earliest 'pure' Dutch pastorals, expressing idyllic country life free from reference to a specific literary source. Similarly, painters like Aelbert Cuyp, a slightly older contemporary of Potter's, were themselves turning towards the depiction of idyllic country scenes, populated by gently grazing livestock and contented countryfolk. Under the influence of painters who had travelled to Italy, especially Pieter van Laer, Potter suffused his depictions of his local Dutch countryside with brilliant effects of light.

The composition of this painting was first established in a surviving preliminary study, drawn in black chalk, heightened with white (fig. 1; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum). The drawing sets out the main elements of Potter's composition, most of which are followed closely in the finished painting. One of the most remarkable elements of the picture is the carefully observed and masterfully rendered reflections in the glass-like surface of the stream. Potter's interest in the brilliant effects of the reflections in the water is already evident in the Ashmolean drawing, where they are captured in rapid, deft touches of black chalk, heightened with white. In the painting, the reflections of the central cow and the woman washing out the tub are subtly refracted by gentle ripples in the water. Potter's manipulation of light in the painting throws a dark shadow over the right side of the stream in the foreground, further changing the nature of the reflections, making them darker and murkier. This is contrasted with the glistening light hitting the water at the left where the reflections of the cow and the plants growing at the water's edge are more clearly defined against sunlight reflected in the stream.





Fig. 2 Paulus Potter, *Cows reflected in the water*, 1648 Mauritshuis, The Hague © Bridgeman Images

The painter's interest in light effects and reflection can be seen again in his *Cow reflected in the water*, painted a year after the present work, in 1648, which similarly used changes of light to brilliant effect (fig. 2; The Hague, Mauritshuis). On visiting the picture gallery of the Stadholder Willem V in 1781, Sir Joshua Reynolds praised that painting as: 'remarkable for the strong reflections...in the water' (*The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, First President of the Royal Academy*, H.W. Beechey, ed., London, 1835, II, p. 194).

The present work is prominently signed and dated '1647' at the top right of the panel. 1647 was a hugely important year in Potter's career, representing the moment he created some of his finest paintings. Significantly, this year saw the creation of Potter's most renowned work, the monumental *Young Bull* (fig. 3; The Hague, Mauritshuis). Regarded during the nineteenth century as one of the greatest paintings executed in the seventeenth century in the Netherlands (alongside Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* and *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*), the *Young Bull* is somewhat unusual in Potter's oeuvre in depicting its subject life-sized. Despite its enormous scale, the *Young Bull* shares numerous traits with the present work: in the brilliantly-observed details of the fur, foliage and earth; in the luminous contrasts of light and shade; and in motifs such as the man leaning on the tree and wooden fence. The present work fits closely with a group of other cabinet pictures made by Potter in the late 1640s, in which the painter employed a low vantage point and created a more compact composition by making the animals overlap. Other examples include *Two cows and a bull* of 1647 (Chicago, Art Institute), *Three Cows* of 1648 (Montpellier, Musée Fabre) and *Bull with two cows in a meadow* of 1649 (Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace). In these works, too, Potter used foreshortened animals to draw the viewer's eye toward the landscape background, emphasising a sense of the continuous landscape stretching towards the distant horizon.

Images of the vernacular countryside, its inhabitants and its livestock can be linked to the burgeoning discussions that life in the country representing an ideal of rest, calm and regeneration which emerged during the seventeenth century (A. Rüger in, *Vermeer and the Delft School*, W. Liedtke, M.C. Plomp and A. Rüger, eds., New Haven and London,



Fig. 3 Paulus Potter, *The Young Bull*, 1647, Mauritshuis, The Hague © Bridgeman Images

2001, p. 335). Patrons in Dutch cities were keen to collect images which captured this idyllic, simple life. These concepts of the pastoral Dutch idyll of country life became increasingly associated with cattle, developing on the long-held connotations these animals had had with fecundity, prosperity and the earth - a trope which continued to be prevalent in Dutch art as demonstrated in Cornelis Bloemaert's etching *Terra* (Earth), which depicted a pastoral scene of cattle and a milkmaid in an idealised landscape. Such associations were also connected with the growing importance of dairy farming to the Dutch economy.

Even in the late-sixteenth century, the dairy industry had been a hugely significant aspect of the Dutch economy. The Florentine historian Lodovico Guicciardini, for example, published the first edition (several others would follow) of his *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* in 1567, providing a full account of the culture, history and economy of the Low Countries. His discussion of the various imports and exports in Europe at the end of the sixteenth century emphasised the centrality of dairy products in the agricultural and economic health of the Netherlands. Indeed, according to Guicciardini, five villages in the Netherlands produced, in one year, as much milk for export as all wine imported into Dordrecht from the Rhine. During the seventeenth century, the milk production of the Dutch provinces and of Friesland was renowned across Europe, far exceeding the yields of English and German cattle. The significance and symbolism of cattle farming and the dairy industry became increasingly entrenched in Dutch culture. Cows appeared, for example, in emblem books, which reached a height of popularity in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. This importance of cattle to Dutch economic strength was clearly reflected in the growing market for paintings of cows, milkmaids and drovers, which increased with ever greater frequency from the 1640s onwards in Holland. Rather than simply representing idyllic scenes of country life, the cattle in paintings such as this could be viewed as symbols of national pride, combining generalised associations of plenty with specific ideas of economic success for the Dutch nation (A. Rüger, *op. cit.*, p 337).

As well as representing the strength of the Dutch economy, in several instances, cows also came to represent the well-being of the Dutch

nation itself (or the *Hollands welvaren*). These popular associations were visualised in a 1644 engraving by Hendrik Hondius. Published as part of a series of allegorical landscapes, Hondius' print showed a group of cows in verdant pastures and a stream, much in line with the pastoral depictions of painters like Potter (fig. 4). Below the image, however, the artist included a poetic commentary on the scene: 'Watchmen, do your best to make sure that the Dutch cow is not stolen from us' ('Ghy Heeren wachters wel neerstelyck toesiet, / Dat Ons gerooft werd de Hollandse koe niet'). This admonition was designed as a commentary against a rushed, unprofitable peace treaty with Spain, against whom the Dutch provinces had been in rebellion since 1566. With the eventual conclusion of peace negotiations at the Treaty of Münster in 1648, the poet and playwright Samuel Coster presented a play on the subject, describing the 'Ruling States of Holland, like the hundred eyed Argus' keeping watch over the cow lo and urging him that he must not sleep but forever be the watchful guardian of the cow (that is her own agreeable Fatherland)' (P. Sutton, 'The Noblest of Livestock', *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*, vol. 15, 1987, p. 108).

The work of Paulus Potter and his contemporaries, therefore, can be seen to address a much broader and more complex set of issues than merely serving as a mimetic representation of the Dutch countryside. Painted at a moment when the Dutch Republic was on the brink of independence from Spanish Rule, after many years of war and economic hardship, depictions of cattle and flourishing local industry in the fields beyond the city came to represent the growing strength of Holland and its people, serving as a triumphant, patriotic symbol of prosperity, fertility and plenty in Holland, and an enduring source of pride for its people.



Fig. 4 Hendrik Hondius, *Koeien in een landschap*, engraving, 1644, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Alexandre Jean Dubois-Drahonet, *Portrait of Lucretia Johanna van Winter*, 1825, Private Collection

A Note on the Provenance:

First recorded in the possession of the Dutch collector and mayor of Leiden, Johan van der Marck Aegidiusz. (1707-1772), by 1770 the Potter had entered the collection of Étienne François, duc de Choiseul (1719-1785), one of the pre-eminent French statesmen of the eighteenth century. Through industry and intrigue, Choiseul rose to become the most powerful person in France after King Louis XV, amassing a great fortune and spending it extravagantly on, among other things, an outstanding collection of Dutch pictures. He was once characterised as 'a wonderful mixture of selfishness, charm, recklessness and exquisite taste'. Choiseul fell out spectacularly with Louis XV in 1770 and retreated in disgrace to his estate, Chanteloup, in the Touraine region of central France. Unable any longer to sustain his princely lifestyle, Choiseul was forced into selling the great majority of his collection in a highly publicised auction in Paris in 1772. Of the 147 paintings that went under the hammer, 113 were Dutch and Flemish, giving a clear barometer of where fashionable taste lay in mid-eighteenth century France. The sale included three other works by Potter, but this was one must have been sold privately, remaining in Paris in the collections of Louis-François de Bourbon, Prince de Conti (1717-1776) and then Achille Joseph Robert de Lignerac, Duc de Caylus (c. 1733-1783).

In 1811, the picture re-surfaced on the market in Paris with the dealer Alexandre Joseph Paillet (1743-1814) and was sent to Amsterdam on consignment to the dealer Louis Bernard Coclers (1741-1817). There it

soon came to the attention of Lucretia Johanna de Winter (1785-1845). Relying on contemporary accounts and letters, Ruud Priem provides a riveting account of her subsequent purchase of the picture on 11 June 1811 (*op. cit.*).

Lucretia was the daughter of the immensely wealthy Amsterdam merchant Pieter van Winter Nicolaas Simonsz (1745-1807), who owned one of the most important private collections ever formed in the Netherlands. It numbered around 180 paintings, including such masterpieces as Rembrandt's *Portraits of Maerten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit*, Jan Steen's *Girl eating Oysters* and Vermeer's *Village Street*, which, after his death, were divided between Lucretia and her sister Ana Louisa Agatha, also known as Annewies (1793-1877). Upon her inheritance, Lucretia began collecting herself using Jeronimo de Vries, who was acting director of the Rijksmuseum, as her agent and adviser. In the fifteen years preceding her marriage in 1822, she acquired 53 pictures, becoming herself one of the most important collectors of her day in Amsterdam and creating a worthy complement to her father's collection.

Paulus Potter represented a gap in her father's collection and was an artist Lucretia had set her sights on. In 1810, she bid Dfl.3600 in a vain attempt to acquire *Two Cows and a Bull* (Chicago, Art Institute), which only seems to have fired her determination to find another. The following year, her agent de Vries received word of an outstanding Potter that had arrived in Amsterdam. His friend, the painter and engraver Reinier

Vinkeles wrote him a letter eulogising about the picture: 'of all the Potters I have seen this is the most pleasing and the finest painting ... this piece has every quality that an excellent painting must possess ... I only know that were it within my powers to purchase this painting, it would certainly be one of the first and best pieces in my collection. For this is a painting that will always give pleasure, conjuring up the sweetest summer afternoon on a sombre winter's day. For yesterday I fancied that I saw nature itself; looking at the trees I seemed to see them sway gently to and fro. I must close, or else my raptures concerning this painting might perhaps run to excess and stray altogether too far from the point' (Priem, *op. cit.*, Appendix II, p. 223). The asking price was Dfl.10,000 and after a protracted negotiation, de Vries managed to secure the picture for Lucretia for Dfl.8001, assuring her that: 'I am certain that it is without equal as a collection piece, nor is there any chance, while there be any art-lover alive, that it will not retain its value' (*ibid.*, p. 145). It proved to be the most expensive picture she ever bought, nearly four times the price she paid for what became by far her most famous acquisition - Vermeer's *Milkmaid* (fig. 5), which she purchased at the sale of Hendrik Muilman in 1813 for Dfl.2125.

With Lucretia's marriage in 1822 to Hendrick Six van Hillegom (1790-1847), her collection was added to that of her husband more than doubling it in size. On their deaths (in 1845 and 1847 respectively), the collection was inherited by their two sons, Jan Pieter Six van Hillegom (1824-1899) and Pieter Hendrik Six van Vromade (1827-1905), who both continued to live in their parental home at 509-511 Heerengracht for a number of years. The house and collection then passed to the former's son, Jan Six van Hillegom (1857-1926), and two years after his death, the Potter reappeared on the market at the famous 1928 Six sale in Amsterdam, which contained 56 paintings: 'the largest and best part of the Six collection' (*ibid.* p. 190), including virtually all of the remaining items from the former collections of Pieter and Lucretia de Winter. The Potter fetched one of the highest prices in the sale (Dfl. 78,000) and was acquired shortly after by an ancestor of the present owners.

*'of all the Potters I have seen
this is the most pleasing and the
finest painting ... this piece has
every quality that an excellent
painting must possess ... for this
is a painting that will always
give pleasure, conjuring up the
sweetest summer afternoon on a
sombre winter's day'*

— Reinier Vinkeles, 1811



Fig 5. Jan Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, c. 1658-60, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Bridgeman Images

