

- 1976 Walker: 295, color repro.
 1982 Leeds: 16.
 1984 Wheelock: 38–39, color repro.
 1985 NGA: 202, repro.
 1987 Sutton: 347.
 1992 NGA: 138, color repro.

1937.1.60 (60)

A Farm in the Sunlight

1668
 Oil on canvas, 81.9 x 66.4 (32¼ x 26⅞)
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

Remnants of a signature and date at bottom right corner:
 . . *bbema* . 668¹

Technical Notes: The support, a fine-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins folded out and incorporated into the picture plane, slightly enlarging the original dimensions. A dark reddish brown ground layer was applied overall, followed by a light brown imprimatura in the foreground, which also serves as a mid-tone. The x-radiograph shows a preliminary sketch rapidly executed in rough paint strokes with a loaded brush. Pentimenti are visible in the largest tree, whose trunk initially continued down to the figures and whose foliage extended higher. The artist also repositioned the figures and may have removed a figure group.²

Paint is applied in thin paste layers, with the foreground, middle ground, and background blocked in with vigorous strokes and individual features added with smaller brushes. The sky was painted first, with reserves left for the trees and landscape. Background elements are worked wet into wet, while middle distance reserves were left for barns and trees. Figures lie over the thinly painted foreground. Scattered small losses and abraded areas exist, along with two extremely large horizontal losses across the lower foreground. Conservation was carried out in 1992 to remove discolored varnish, retouchings, and nineteenth-century overpaint in the foreground. At this time foreground losses were inpainted, re-creating missing landscape details.

Provenance: Possibly R. van Smidt, Brussels. Corneille Louis Reijnders [d. 1821], Brussels, possibly by 1788;³ William Buchanan, London; George Watson Taylor, M. P. [d. 1841], London and later Erlestoke Park, Devizes, Wiltshire;⁴ (sale, Christie, London, 13–14 June 1823, no. 56, bought in);⁵ (sale, Robins, 9 July to 1 August 1832, no. 69);⁶ Charles J. Nieuwenhuys [1799–1883], Brussels and London; (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 10–11 May 1833 no. 128). Henri Hérès, Brussels and London; Leopold I [1790–1865], Palais Royal, Brussels; inherited by his son, Leopold II [1835–1909], Brussels; (F. Kleinberger & Co., Paris, in 1909); August de Ridder [1837–1911], Cronberg, near Frankfurt-am-Main, in 1910; (sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2 June 1924, no. 26); (M. Knoedler & Co., New York); sold December 1924 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington;⁷ deeded 28 December 1934 to The A. W. Mellon

Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: *British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom*, London, 1818, no. 84. *Ausstellung der De Ridder Sammlung*, Städelches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1911–1913.⁸ *Dutch Masters of the Seventeenth Century*, Knoedler Galleries, New York, 1925, no. 17, repro. *El Siglo de Oro del Paisaje Holandés*, Madrid, 1994–1995, no. 32, repro. 132.

THIS RURAL LANDSCAPE scene has long been esteemed as one of Hobbema's finest paintings. In 1890 Michel described it as one of Hobbema's most remarkable works, and Bode, in the translation of his 1910 catalogue, termed it "a masterpiece with which few can compare."⁹ Its distinguished provenance dates back to the end of the eighteenth century. From its earliest appearance in the literature it formed a pendant to Hobbema's famous painting of a watermill in the Louvre (fig. 1).¹⁰ The two works were separated at the Nieuwenhuys sale in 1833.

As in other instances where pendant relationships seem to exist, no irrefutable proof exists that these works were originally intended to be hung together, although compositional and stylistic similarities reinforce the historical evidence. In both paintings the focus of the composition is the sunlit farm buildings in the middle ground. The shaded large trees that occupy the foreground have long, flowing trunks surmounted by an open structure of branches and foliage. Their dark brownish green tones act as a foil to the yellow glow of the sunlit distance. Above all, the vertical formats of the paintings, rare among Hobbema's works, argue for the hypothesis that they were intended to hang together. Other artists, including Salomon van Ruysdael, used this format for companion pieces.¹¹

The vertical format was one of the reasons given by Jakob Rosenberg for dating this work around or after 1670. Rosenberg also argued for a late date on the basis of the transparency of the upper parts of the trees, the exaggeration of specific Hobbema effects, and the reduction of the corporeality of the landscape.¹² Rosenberg it seems pushed the date too late. Painting in a vertical format became fashionable by about 1665 and often occurred in the work of Jacob van Ruysdael during the late 1660s. Although the trees in this work are somewhat elongated and the foliage is relatively transparent, stylistically they do not differ substantially from those in Hobbema's *A View on a High Road* (1937.1.62), signed and dated 1665. The most significant difference between these paintings is the increased complexity of the compositional structure of *A Farm in the Sunlight*. In this case, the viewer is denied easy access into the background

along a meandering road: the foreground path leads out of the composition to the left, and one is forced to retrace and find other routes to the distant vistas. This complex spatial organization seems a natural evolution from Hobbema's compositional structures of the mid-1660s and offers further evidence for a 1668 date of execution.

The watermill in the Louvre painting has been identified as that belonging to the manor house of Singraven near Denekamp in the province of Overijssel.¹³ If the two paintings are indeed pendants one might expect that the Washington composition also represents a precise location. No specific site, however, has yet been suggested for the scene, and it seems unlikely that the buildings here represented, none of which have distinctive characteristics, can ever be identified. Nevertheless, the type of vernacular architecture represented, with the high-peaked roof of the half-timbered barn, is representative of that found in the eastern provinces of the Netherlands, including Overijssel.

Finally, as is typical of Hobbema's paintings, the figural group in the foreground is probably by another hand. The names of Abraham Storck (1644–after 1704) and Adriaen van de Velde (1636–1672) have been proposed, but neither suggestion is acceptable.¹⁴

Fig. 1. Meindert Hobbema, *The Mill*, c. 1668, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre, © Photo R.M.N.



Notes

1. Some sources (HdG 1907–1927, 4: 379; Broulhiet 1938, 437; NGA 1941, 97; De Ridder sale catalogue; and G. H. McCall in the Duveen-produced draft catalogue from about 1940 of Knoedler contributions to the Mellon Collection) say that the picture is signed, while others (Smith 1829–1842, 6: 128–129; NGA 1965, 67; and NGA 1975, 174–175) do not. Conservation treatment undertaken at the NGA in 1991–1992 uncovered the remnants of the signature and date in the heavily damaged bottom part of the painting.

2. Limited pigment analysis is available in the Scientific Research department (6 January 1992).

3. According to Nieuwenhuys sale catalogue (Christie & Manson 1833).

4. Broulhiet 1938, 437, and HdG 1907–1927, 4: 362. In the general election return of 1826, Taylor's address was given as Erlestoke Park, Wiltshire, while in earlier elections he was said to be from London (Saville Row in 1816, Portland Place in 1818 and 1820). (Letter, C. C. Pond, House of Commons Information Office, London, 12 May 1986, in NGA curatorial files.)

5. A results sheet bound into copy of the sale catalogue in archives at Christie's, London, gives the buyer as "Seguire." This auction catalogue also notes the previous ownership of the painting by R. van Smidt.

6. Various sources say that the picture was "sold by his heirs in 1832," but Taylor did not die until 1841 (a date confirmed by the librarian at the House of Commons). This error may have arisen because the 1832 sale was described as containing the "magnificent property" of George Watson Taylor, a description that could easily be interpreted as signifying the estate of someone who had died.

7. Nancy C. Little, librarian, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, says that the painting (Knoedler no. 15993) was bought by Knoedler from Lair Dubreuil, Paris, in June 1924, and was sold to Mr. Mellon in December of the same year (letter, 12 September 1987, in NGA curatorial files.) Annotated copy of the De Ridder sale catalogue in the NGA library does not, however, mention Dubreuil, and gives the buyer as Knoedler.

8. No catalogue for this exhibition was produced. Information was kindly provided by Dr. Hans Joachim Ziemke in a letter of 7 September 1987 (in NGA curatorial files). Although unverified, there is mention of another exhibition containing this painting from the period; Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1913, no. 60. The notation comes from G. H. McCall, draft catalogue (see note 1).

9. Michel 1890b, 49; Bode 1910/1913, 14.

10. Inv. no. 2404. Smith 1829–1842, 6: 129, no. 53; HdG 1907–1927, 4: 401–402, no. 89; Broulhiet 1938, 441. The dimensions of the Louvre painting (80 x 66 cm) are similar to those of *A Farm in the Sunlight*.

11. Compare his pair of dune landscapes at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, reproduced in Stechow 1938, cats. 35, 36, figs. 48, 49.

12. Rosenberg 1927, 151.

13. Döhmman and Dingeldein 1934, 3: 144–145.

14. Smith 1829–1842, 6: 129 (under no. 53), said the figures are by Storck. Thoré (Bürger) 1859, 35, said they were "attributed to Adriaen van der Velde, but they are not by him."

References

1824b Buchanan, 2: 303.

1829–1842 Smith, 6 (1835): 128–129, no. 52.



Meindert Hobbema, *A Farm in the Sunlight*, 1937.1.60

- 1834 Nieuwenhuys: 138–139.
- 1839 Hérís: 5–7.
- 1857 Thoré (Bürger): 287.
- 1859 Thoré (Bürger): 28–44.
- 1864 Scheltema: 214–226.
- 1890 Michel: 24, 49.
- 1891 Cundall: 155.
- 1895 Lafenestre and Richtenberger: 132.
- 1897 Roberts: 1: 106.
- 1906b Michel: 207 (also 1910 English trans.: 164).
- 1909 Holmes: 238–243, repro.
- 1909 Roberts: 203–210, repro.
- 1909 Wauters: 5.
- 1910 Bode: 30 (also 1913 English trans.: 14, pl. 60).
- 1907–1927 HdG, 4 (1912): 362, no. 28.
- 1924 Catroux: unpaginated, no. 26, repro.
- 1927 Rosenberg: 139–151.
- 1938 Broulhiet: 52–53, 326, 437, no. 449, repro.
- 1941 NGA: 97.
- 1949 Mellon: 100, repro.
- 1965 NGA: 67.
- 1966 Stechow: 78–79.
- 1968 NGA: 60, repro.
- 1975 NGA: 174–175, repro.
- 1976 Walker: 295, color repro.
- 1985 NGA: 201, repro.
- 1994 Madrid: no. 32, repro.

1942.9.32 (628)

Village near a Pool

c. 1670

Oil on canvas, 81 x 107 (32 x 42)

Widener Collection

Technical Notes: The original support is a tightly woven, plain-weave fabric, lined with the tacking margins removed and the original dimensions retained. The double ground consists of a thick pale ocher lower layer covered by a thin black layer. Paint is applied thinly in dark passages, and with more body and with visible brushmarks in lighter passages.

Hobbema appears to have reworked several areas of the composition, particularly the trees at the center, where long, low branches were eliminated from the left sides of the left and central trees. The x-radiograph does not show clearly Hobbema's changes, which are easily confused with later repaints to the extensively abraded trees. Due to abrasion in the sky, birds painted out by Hobbema have become visible again at left and center, and were reinforced with later overpaint. Most of the foreground is in good condition, although the cow and horse are abraded and part of the rider's hat is lost. Numerous small losses exist in the sky and lower left foreground.

The painting was lined in 1963. Vandalism in 1966 produced large scratches in a regular grid pattern, which were treated locally. Conservation was carried out in 1974 to remove discolored varnish layers and the more obvious repaints in the sky, water, and trees. The overpainted tree trunks were left as is. In 1981, adjustments were made to the sky inpainting, and a pigmented synthetic varnish was applied locally to unify the appearance.

Provenance: Count Santar, Lisbon, and around 1850, London.¹ (Hamburger, Paris, by 1909); Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, in 1909; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

A SUNLIT VILLAGE with half-timbered houses sits nestled among trees beyond a small pond. A dirt road, skirting the pond to the right, passes beneath two large trees and leads out of the painting. A falconer, riding a white horse and accompanied by his helper and four dogs, travels along the road, while a fisherman in a red jacket on the near shore casts his line. Although this idyllic scene is neither signed nor dated, it has always been attributed to Hobbema, an attribution that is justified by the compositional schema, the fall of light in the middle distance, the building types, and the delicate touch evident in the landscape in the distant left. The painting has, indeed, many beautiful passages, but it has also suffered badly over the years, and many of its original qualities are no longer evident.

The most disturbing elements in the painting are the two large trees that rise in the right foreground. Their trunks seem too heavy for their size and the branches lack the rhythms characteristic of Hobbema's work. The leaves are also not as clearly articulated as usual. These stylistic problems are the result of old overpainting that was probably applied to cover abrasion to the surface as well as pentimenti that became obvious because of the increasing translucency of the paint. Still evident, because of the dense crackle pattern in the paint, is the original form of a large branch that extended out just above the steeple of the church and the large tree rising from the village. The trees, however, are not the only areas that have suffered. General abrasion and old overpainting can be found throughout the composition, with only the sunlit area in the center remaining essentially intact. When the painting was restored in 1974 it was found that much of this old overpainting was extremely hard and should not be removed for fear of damaging the original paint.

The distortions in form due to overpainting have been intensified by the denser and darker character of the additions. As a result, the spatial flow of the composition has been affected, and the contrast between, for example, the silhouetted trees and the sky must be greater now than Hobbema originally intended.

Even with the modifications to the image that have occurred, one can place this work chronologically around 1670. As with *A Farm in the Sunlight* (1937.1.60), which dates 1668, Hobbema has focused