

Hendrick Avercamp

1585–1634

HENDRICK AVERCAMP, born in Amsterdam in a house next to the Nieuwe Kerk, was baptized in the Oude Kerk on 27 January 1585. In 1586 the family moved to Kampen, where Avercamp's father set up an apothecary's business that continued to be run after his death by his son Lambert. Another son also studied medicine, and the members of this well-educated family were for many years prominent citizens of Kampen.

For his artistic training, Hendrick went to Amsterdam to study with the Danish portrait painter Pieter Isaacks (1569–1625). In 1607, King Christiaan IV recalled Isaacks to Denmark, and Avercamp appears among the list of buyers at the auction of his teacher's effects as "de stom tot Pieter Isacqs" [Pieter Isaacks' mute]. Various other records testify to Avercamp's disability: in 1622, a document refers to him as "Hendrick Avercamp de Stomme," and his mother's will, drawn up in 1633, instructs that her unmarried, "mute and miserable" son Hendrick should receive, in addition to his portion of the inheritance, an extra allowance of one hundred guilders a year for life from family capital.

During his apprenticeship in Amsterdam, Avercamp came under the influence of the Flemish painters of mannerist landscapes who were then living in the city, notably Gillis van Coninxloo (1544–1607) and David Vinckboons (1576–1630/1633). It has been suggested on stylistic grounds that Vinckboons may have been another of Avercamp's teachers, but no documentation of such a relationship exists.

From his earliest works, however—the first dated examples of which come from 1601—Avercamp's style is quite individual, and is most strongly connected, not with any Amsterdam trends, but with the work of the minor Kampen artist Gerrit van der Horst (1581/1582–1629). By 28 January 1614 Avercamp was back in Kampen, where he seems to have remained until his death in May 1634.¹ There, in relative isolation from the mainstreams of Dutch art, he devoted himself almost entirely to the painting of winter scenes and specifically to depictions of crowds of people engaging in a wide range of activities on frozen rivers.

Avercamp had no important direct followers, although his nephew Barent Avercamp (c. 1612–1679) was his pupil, as were Arent Arentsz. (called Cabel)

(1585/1586–1635), and Dirck Hardenstein II (1620–after 1674).

Notes

1. Avercamp, however, must have occasionally returned to Amsterdam, as is suggested by a drawing he made of the Haarlemmerpoort in Amsterdam, which was constructed between 1615 and 1618. See Amsterdam 1993a: 56, no. 23, repro.

Bibliography

Welcker 1933/1979.
Amsterdam 1982a.
Blankert 1982a.
Wiersma 1985.
Amsterdam 1987: 254–261.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 3.

1967.3.1 (2315)

A Scene on the Ice

c. 1625
Oil on oak, 39.2 x 77 (15⁷/₁₆ x 30⁷/₁₆)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Inscriptions

At lower left (in ligature): HA

Technical Notes: The support, a single oak panel with a horizontal grain, has been thinned and a cradle attached. Dendrochronology shows the panel to be from a tree felled between 1606 and 1616.¹ Triangular wood inserts replace the bottom right and left corners. The wood grain is quite prominent, due to increased transparency of the aged oil paint and moderate abrasion overall. A thin, smooth, white ground layer is followed by a coarse, granular, gray imprimatura. The horizontal, striated strokes of the imprimatura application, visible through the thin sky, are incorporated into the design of the foreground figures.

Paint is applied in thin, smooth transparent layers with more opaque paint used in the details and white highlights. Very fine contours were applied around the figures with liquid black paint. While discrete losses are few, the paint surface has been heavily abraded, most notably in the sky near the right and along all four edges. Some figures in the middle ground were almost totally reconstructed when the painting was restored in the early twentieth century. The horse and most foreground figures have also been reinforced, sometimes quite inaccurately (see text). No conservation treatment has been carried out at the National Gallery.

Provenance: Said to have been at the Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg;² (D. Katz, Dieren), by 1933; J. M.