



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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Cornelis Springer

Dutch, 1817–1891

310 | Dutch Street Scene c. 1850–55

Oil on panel, 31 x 23 cm

Lower right: C.Springer [CS in monogram]
1955.857

311 | Dutch Street Scene c. 1850–55

Oil on panel, 31 x 22.9 cm

Lower right: C.Springer [CS in monogram]
1955.858

Cornelis Springer was a prolific and financially successful painter who specialized in Dutch cityscapes. He first learned the rudiments of architectural and perspectival drawing from his older brother Hendrik (1805–1867), who was an architect by trade. Springer later studied with Kaspar Karsen (1810–1896), with whom he collaborated on the *View of Hague from the Delftse Vaart in the Seventeenth Century* (1852; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Like Karsen, Springer often created cityscapes that, while including elements of existing buildings and places, were constructed from his imagination. This working method has often confounded scholars, who have tried in vain to assign a location to his paintings. In fact, both of the Clark's paintings have traditionally been identified as Amsterdam street scenes, when they are actually imaginary



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mélanges put together from disparate elements that Springer most likely pulled from his sketchbooks.¹ They belong to the long Dutch tradition of painting architectural fantasies, whose most famous practitioner was the seventeenth-century artist Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712).

While Springer did not paint the Clark pictures directly from life, they are full of meticulous architectural details that could only come out of prolonged study of actual buildings. One of the most impressive passages is the crown steeple on the top of the bell tower of the church in the background of *Dutch Street Scene* (cat. 310). The care with which Springer articulated the various surface and structural elements of the architecture, including the brick, stone, wood, and glass, leaves no doubt as to the artist's

primary interest. Typical of Springer's pictures, the buildings in these paintings betray no influence of modern nineteenth-century architecture; rather, they hark back to the architecture of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Indeed, Springer concentrated his studies in the older parts of Amsterdam and often traveled to smaller towns outside the city in search of older buildings. In some of his later paintings, Springer even populated his antiquated buildings with figures in period dress to match his architectural models.²

In both of the Clark's pictures, Springer has enlivened his scenes with a number of figures that give the paintings a human element. In one of the pictures (cat. 310), several people are engaged in a busy trade of flowers and vegetables in front of a covered wagon.

The other image (cat. 311), while not as populated, includes some passers-by and even two children squatting and playing a game, possibly marbles or *hul gul* (a Dutch guessing game involving buttons). Of particular note, however, is that both paintings include a figure in mid-stride at the center foreground. This is a motif that Springer used most often in the early 1850s, and the presence of these figures argues for such a date for both pictures.

After buying these two paintings on 2 February 1946, Clark wrote enthusiastically to his friend the painter Paul Lewis Clemens (1911–1992) describing his purchase:

Bought a pair of small pictures of street views in Amsterdam by Cornelius Springer. . . . Very strongly influenced by Van der Hayden [sic]. They are beautifully painted. Practically unknown here. I did not know him. Took them to De Wild to have streets identified. He said excellent and introduced me to several other Dutch painters of the period by reproductions. The Dutch have never forgotten how to paint. All of these men sell in Holland and Belgium but as they did not go in for production they are practically unknown abroad. I think these Springers are quite as good as Van der Hayden or very nearly so. Same subject. Rather broad in paint.³

This passage is exemplary of Clark's unrelenting curiosity, art-historical knowledge, and keen interest in the market for art. It is worth remembering that by 1946, Clark had already amassed the bulk of his superb collection of paintings, yet had collected Dutch artists only perfunctorily, and even less so Dutch cityscapes. Nonetheless, when he saw something he liked in Springer's work, he immediately sought to learn more about him and others like him. His preferred paintings restorer, Charles De Wild, was an expert on Dutch painting, and Sterling eagerly tapped his knowledge. As was usually the case with Clark, it was the painterly craftsmanship in these paintings that sparked his interest. His keen appreciation for paint is perhaps the main connecting thread throughout his varied collection. Clark's varied art-historical interests and curiosity are further manifested in the fact that, while he did not actively collect Dutch paintings, he was familiar with the work of Van der Heyden. One might conjecture that Clark, whose diaries reveal

that he closely monitored the art market, believed that Van der Heyden's work was priced too high, while these pictures by Springer, which he bought as a pair for five hundred fifty dollars, were a bargain. DC

PROVENANCE [Clyfford Trevor, New York, sold to Clark, 2 Feb. 1946]; Robert Sterling Clark (1946–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Cat. 310: Williamstown 1958a, ill.; Williamstown 1979, no cat.; Williamstown 1990a, no cat.; Williamstown 1993a, no cat.

Cat. 311: Williamstown 1979, no cat.; Williamstown, 1988–89, no cat.; Williamstown 1990a, no cat.; Williamstown 1993a, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT Cat. 310: The support is an oak panel (0.5 cm thick), with shallow chamfered reverse edges (2.2 cm wide). The grain runs vertically, and the panel has a slight convex warp. The reverse may be stained dark or has oxidized rather heavily to a dark color. A 2.5-cm crack is found near the center top edge, and there is a small check in the upper right corner. Noticeable age cracks appear in the heavier white paint strokes, and fine aperture cracks can be seen in the sky and the distant church. Some thin color areas of paint or ink are abraded in the window details, dark areas of the figures, and the dog's body. These damages probably occurred during a cleaning before 1946. There is frame abrasion on all four sides, and framing pressure has damaged the last half of the signature in the lower right corner. The top edge of the picture is extensively retouched. The ultraviolet light fluorescence is slight and thin where old varnish remains, and these earlier residues have their own crackle system. Bright, densely fluorescing patches where the ground is exposed may indicate the presence of zinc white pigment in the upper ground layer. The varnish is soft and even. In reflected light, the panel grain is visible in the sky, as are the scattered impastos.

The ground appears to have two commercially applied off-white layers. The ground shows through areas of the sky and parts of the right-most building. Only a few graphite lines of underdrawing are visible, identified by their metallic sheen. Traces of these lines can be seen under low magnification where the ridge pole juts out from the tall thin building. A brown paint sketch below the final colors can be seen occasionally in the figures. The paint is a fluid buildup of small daubs of color, increasing in thickness as the colors move from dark to brighter and lighter. It appears that black ink was used for the window and figure detailing. Short, dark brush hairs (sable type) were seen embedded in the paint. In general, this painting is in better condition than its companion.

Cat. 311: The support is a ring-porous hardwood panel, possibly oak, of 1–1.3 cm thickness, with a slight concave warp. The back appears to have been stained dark, and the

edges have chamfers 3.2 cm wide. Small chunks of wood are missing along the top edge and in the lower and upper right corners. When the painting was cleaned of a thick natural resin layer in 1987, it was noted that an earlier cleaning had eroded the dark-shaded buildings, tree foliage, cobblestones, and the signature. It is likely that the painting was cleaned by a dealer before the 1946 purchase. In general, this picture has suffered more solvent abrasion than the companion street scene, some of which is still evident. Clear inclusions, perhaps paint components, have been exposed by overcleaning in the thin dark foliage. There are fine aperture cracks in the sky and in the white details, suggesting that something about the white paint may have precipitated this condition. Brown streaks in the sky following the panel's grain are the result of wood tannins migrating into the ground layer. In ultraviolet light, new inpainting can be seen scattered in the sky, on the distant church tower, and along the top edge. In reflected light, the coating has a slightly sprayed appearance.

The ground is composed of several off-white commercially primed layers. There may be faint graphite or charcoal underdrawing lines, seen in low magnification in areas of exposed ground at the intersections of forms. No lines were seen with infrared reflectography. This paint layer was created using the same paint buildup and possible black ink-work details as in the companion scene. A speckled mixture of white, gritty material is seen in the dark green and dark brown trees. The texture of this ingredient has been enhanced by cleaning which has leached away the surrounding paint medium. The signature "CSpringer" may have been executed in brown ink.

1. Clark, for instance, bought the paintings as views of Amsterdam streets. Labels on the backs of the panels, however, show that at one time the pictures were identified with Rotterdam. The first person to point out definitively that the Clark paintings are composites of various elements of Dutch townscapes was Ms. Tellegow, the assistant librarian of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague. Her analysis is in the Clark's curatorial files and is dated 7 May 1975.
2. For example, see his 1877 *The Delfland Gemeenschapshuis and the Old Church of Delft in Summer*, reproduced as no. 77-2 in Laanstra et al. 1984, p. 193.
3. Robert Sterling Clark to Paul Lewis Clemens, 2 Feb. 1946, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Archives, Williamstown.

Philip Wilson Steer

English, 1860–1942

312 | Sunset 1913

Oil on canvas, 61 x 81.7 cm

Lower right: P W Steer 1913

1955.36

The fiery pink of the setting sun, the purples of the wispy clouds, and the dramatic reflections of the sky setting ablaze the sea of Harwich Harbor typify Philip Wilson Steer's mastery of color and paint. Bruce Laughton calls *Sunset* a "minor masterpiece, a shot fired for the old guard: a bleached and glazed Turnerian sky; Whistlerian harbour lights; broken water surface like early Monet."¹ Although Steer is considered a leading figure in the British response to French Impressionism, his landscapes and seascapes are most often identified with the English tradition of J. M. W. Turner and John Constable. Interpreters of his work have placed varying weights on Steer's dual inheritance, often ignoring his French training and privileging the native roots as in the London Times' obituary, which states that his work is "sturdily and traditionally English."²

Having abandoned a civil service career, Steer had his first instruction in art at the Gloucester School of Art and subsequently at the South Kensington Drawing Schools. His earliest exposure to the art world, however, was from his father, Philip Steer, who was a painter. The younger Steer, rejected by the Royal Academy Schools, studied in Paris first with William-Adolphe Bouguereau at the Académie Julian and then with Alexandre Cabanel at the École des Beaux-Arts from January 1883. His work shows the first indications of Impressionist techniques in 1884, the year of his return to London and the same year that he began his annual summer trips away from the capital. Coastal towns in England and France, such as Walberswick (1884; 1888), Étaples (1887), Boulogne (1891; 1894), Montreuil-sur-Mer (1889; 1907), and Cowes (1892) provided him with sources for his drawings and paintings.³

Steer's views of Harwich date from two periods of his mature career. The Clark's painting belongs to the group of works he did between 1913 and 1914.⁴ In his works dating from the late 1920s and early 1930s, he employed his then-favorite medium of watercolor. Steer's alliance with the avant-garde stream of early