

DIRK LANGENDYK

(Rotterdam 1748 - Rotterdam 1805)

Elegant Figures in Conversation at a Quay, Boats being Loaded to the Right

signed and dated in pen and black ink 'Langendyk Fecit 1784' (lower left)
pen and black ink and grey wash over black chalk
29.5 x 47 cm (11 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ in)

Provenance: Sale, 'J. L.L.', Paris, 19 March, 1925, lot 39.

THIS DRAWING OF A BUSTLING QUAY ILLUSTRATES Dirk Langendyk's skill as a draughtsman. On the left-hand side three dock workers sit and slouch on boulders chatting. They stand in contrast both in pose and dress to the group of three elegant figures in the centre of the composition. This group are stiffly formal and their comparatively elaborate costume and hairstyles catch the eye. Just beyond them, two figures survey the loading of the boats from horseback. A procession of mules is being led down to the edge of the water, where the animals are relieved of their heavy loads, which are being transferred onboard the docked vessel. The tower looming over the workers helps to ground the work and draws the eye to the classical architecture and mountainous landscape beyond. The busy composition on the left-hand side is contrasted on the right by the calm sea that stretches away towards the horizon, where the faint outlines of ships and the setting sun can be made out.

Langendyk was a prolific artistic and he often depicted military scenes, such as *An Embarkation of Soldiers; Marching from behind a Building at Left down towards Ships in the Harbour at R, more with Packages and Trunks in the Foreground, a Woman Talking to One Soldier at Centre* (fig. 1). Despite the military theme, there are notable similarities between the British Museum work and *Elegant Figures in Conversation at a Quay, Boats being Loaded to the Right* not least in that the mood of both works is of busy activity. Despite the fairly populous foregrounds, the figures in both drawings interact in small, clearly defined groups. Again the figures in the British Museum work display a variety of poses and costume, from the peasants who lug heavy burdens on their backs, to the formal and elegant officers who oversee proceedings. Both drawings are also characterised by a sophisticated use of light. The modelling of light on the figures and the landscape is constantly, but subtly, varied. Therefore although the tonal contrasts are not extreme, Langendyk's drawings are characterised by a lively use of light.

Langendyk was a pupil of Dirck Anthonie Bisschop, an interior decorator and a painter of coats of arms and coaches. From the beginning of his career Langendyk depicted primarily military scenes and this is evident in the skilled depiction of horses and soldiers in both of the illustrated works. As his career progressed he drew inspiration for these military scenes from the Dutch



Dirk Langendyk, *An Embarkation of Soldiers; Marching from behind a Building at Left down towards Ships in the Harbour at R, more with Packages and Trunks in the Foreground, a Woman Talking to One Soldier at Centre*, 1800, The British Museum, London (Figure 1)

conflict between the Patriots and the Orangists, and from the invasions of the Dutch Republic by the French and Anglo-Russian armies in 1795 and 1799 respectively. Langendyk's style is characterised by a concentration on crowds rather than individuals, as is evident in the present work. In his military scenes, we typically see the interaction between groups of officers and soldiers before and during battle. However, as well as military scenes, Langendyk also depicted many scenes of coastal life, such as the Courtauld Gallery's *Shipping in a Storm off the Coast*. He executed many of his works without pencil and pen, often just drawing with a brush.

Langendyk was primarily a draughtsman and he was greatly admired in his lifetime, particularly for his detailed rendering of equestrian combat scenes. He was also, to a lesser extent, a painter and etcher, although dated paintings by him are only known from the period of 1771 to 1772 and from 1780. These generally depict the daily life of soldiers and landed gentry.

