

# ROELANDT SAVERY

(Kortrijk 1576 - Utrecht 1639)

## *A Rocky Landscape with Two Huntsmen and a Dog by Fallen Fir Trees*

inscribed and dated 'In pariis. 1625.' (upper right)  
black chalk, pen and grey ink, grey wash  
19.7 x 27.6 cm (7¾ x 10 ⅞ in)

**Provenance:** An unidentified collector's mark G (*verso*);  
with Gebr. Douwes Fine Art, London.

ROELANDT SAVERY'S INTRICATE AND BEAUTIFULLY complex composition challenges the viewer at every turn, not least with the sheer amount of detail and unconventional perspective generated by the skewed, perpendicular fir trees. The peculiarly surreal atmosphere that Savery often conjured up, in his favoured subjects of Orpheus and the Garden of Eden,<sup>1</sup> is no less vivid in this drawing; twining ivy tendrils are wrapped around a protruding fallen tree and give the landscape an exotic, jungle-like feel. The same can be said for the rocky promontory itself. Seemingly unconnected to anything else, it imbues the scene with a sense of isolation and mystery. A harmonious contrast is achieved between the darker foreground figures.

Savery settled in Haarlem in about 1585 having fled from the Spanish occupied Southern Netherlands. Initially he was taught by his elder brother, Jacob (c.15650-1603) as well as by Hans Bol (1534-1593). His best known association, however, was with the court of the Hapsburg emperor, Rudolf II, through which Savery made contact with a group of international artists including Bartholomäus Spranger (1546-1611) (see catalogue no. 88) and Hans von Aachen (1552-1615). Savery particularly enjoyed drawing the emperor's impressive menagerie of wild animals from life, which even included a dodo, as well as the stags in Rudolf's hunting fields. A number of his finest paintings incorporate a staggering array of wildlife as a result of these preparatory studies.

An equally important contribution to his works from the Prague court came from Rudolf II's first commission, when he sent the artist to complete sketches of the Tyrol between c.1606 and 1607 (fig.1). The resultant drawings, depicting majestic jagged mountain peaks, rivers and dense forest served as invaluable reference material for Savery's later, large-scale works. Savery made his early travel drawings using the same materials that he often combined, namely black chalk and coloured wash, as is the case in *A Rocky Landscape with Two Huntsmen and a Dog by Fallen Fir Trees*. As in the present work, the overall impression is one of the vast scale of nature in relation to humankind; the human figures on the track in *Alpine Landscape*, just like the two huntsmen, are miniscule against the ineffable forces of nature.

The artist's preoccupation, in the tradition of Gillis van Coninxloo (1544-1607) and Paulus van Vianen (c.1570-1613), with transcribing nature exactly as he saw it and his predilection for bizarre rocky landscapes are clearly

<sup>1</sup> Examples include his *Orpheus* in the National Gallery, London, and his *Garden of Eden*, in the Farringdon Collection, Buscot, Oxon.



Roelandt Savery, *Alpine Landscape*, c.1606-7, The British Museum (Figure 1)

reflected in this present work. Perhaps more accurately, Savery saw no reason why nature itself could not serve as the main point of dramatic departure in a work. This certainly explains elements of the present composition in which the two huntsmen and their dog are almost entirely obscured in the face of powerful elemental forces.

Savery returned from Amsterdam in 1613 and settled eventually in Utrecht. Besides his fantastical compositions of rocky scenery and exotic animals, he is remembered as one of the first flower painters to introduce the genre, and his works became highly influential on Dutch artists of the next generation. Savery had made the acquaintance of Ambrosius Bosschaert I (1573-1621) and Balthasar van der Ast (1593/4-1657), and his pupils included Allaert van Everdingen (1621-1675) (see catalogue no. 124).

In the 1620s, Savery was one of the most sought after and highly paid artists in Utrecht; some of his pieces commanded prices that were usually reserved for large, historical paintings.



(Actual Size)