

JOHANN HEINRICH ROOS

(Otterburg 1631 - Frankfurt am Main 1685)

A Peasant Family and their Animals by Ruins

signed 'JH Roos [JHR in ligature] fecit', with a subsidiary study of child in black chalk (verso)
pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash, pen and grey ink framing lines
26.1 x 19.8 cm (10¼ x 7¾ in)

Provenance: Sir Thomas Lawrence (L. 2445);

W. Esdaile (L. 2617), his partial mount with attribution 'J.H. Roos' (recto and verso)
and inscription 'Formerly in the colln of Sir Thos Lawrence J-H-Roos' (verso);

Christie's, London, 22 June 1840 (4th Day's Sale), probably lot 821 as

'Roos: Peasants, with cattle and sheep near some Roman ruins, pen and ink; very spirited' (with lot 820, also by Roos, 11s. to Tiffin);
Colonel H.A. Clowes, and by descent

THE CRUMBLING STONE ARCH THAT FRAMES THE precisely drawn peasant family is a familiar motif throughout Johann Heinrich Roos' work. In both his paintings and drawings, he became highly skilled at incorporating antique ruins within scenes of everyday rural life and placing animals in idealised southern landscapes. The comparison between the faintly etched surroundings and the more polished peasant figures, complete with their customary dress, is echoed in a work in the Crocker Art Museum (fig.1). Here, as in the present work, it is the animals and the humans that engender Roos' particular artistic fascination, the ruins merely providing an aesthetically pleasing backdrop.

Roman Landscape with Cattle and Shepherds, see fig. 2, provides an indication of how Roos' drawings might have been used as preparatory sketches, for paintings with his animals taking on a glossy, almost photographic effect.



Johann Heinrich Roos,
A Roman Landscape
c.1661,
Crocker Art Museum,
California
(Figure 1)
Johann Heinrich Roos,



Roman Landscape with Cattle and Shepherds, 1676,
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota (Figure 2)

Roos was the pre-eminent painter of animals in Germany. He is noted for his realistic depictions of cattle, goats and sheep and often included them in what are known as his 'pastoral idylls'. Numbering at least two hundred, and dating from 1657 until his early death in 1685, he took great pleasure in featuring the Italianate landscapes favoured by artists such as Karl Dujardin (1622-1678) (see inventory) and Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683) (see cat. no. 121). The influence of the latter, in particular, can be seen clearly in this present work, as well as that of one of his tutors in landscaping, Cornelis de Bie (1627-1711/16).

Roos' pastoral idylls perhaps allude to a longing for a return to the natural harmony ordinarily linking mankind and animals to their natural landscape after the devastation caused by the Thirty Years War from which he and his family fled in about 1637.



(Actual Size)