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ADAM WILLAERTS

London 1577- 1664 Utrecht

Elegant company on a beach visit, a fish market beyond.

Oil on Panel, 83.9 x 43.2 cm.
Signed with the Monogram lower centre

Provenance:
Private Collection, Switzerland.

Lively panoramic estuary scenes such as seen here were frequently depicted by the Utrecht painter Adam Willaerts (1577 – 1664). O. Nelemans (*op.cit.*) who was the first to compile a catalogue of the paintings by the artist, records some 69 fully autograph works. The present painting, is from the artist's best period and though previously unknown is considered by as entirely autograph.

Willaerts chose a maritime subject as his speciality, although Utrecht is nowhere near the coast. Yet, Adam's preferred subject matter has to be seen against his Flemish background, by which he obviously and deliberately chose to follow the idiom of Cornelis Vroom and its famous predecessor Pieter Brueghel I. In the early years of the 17th century with numerous Flemish immigrants having gone north, there was a strong market for paintings which appealed to Flemish taste and foresaw in the nostalgia for the country and its culture left behind.

Adam Willaerts biography starts in London where he was born into a family of Flemish immigrants. He was baptized in Austin Friars on the 21st of July 1577. By the late 1580's, the family was back in the Netherlands. Soon and probably already in the 1590's they must have settled in Utrecht.

Here Adam set up a painter's studio, specializing in cabinet sized colorful marine scenes and was among the founders of the local Guild of Saint Luke in 1611. A member of the Contra remonstrant community, he married in 1605 and had six children. His three sons Cornelis, born in 1611, Abraham 1613 and Isaac born circa 1620 all followed in his footsteps and continued in the tradition as set out by their father, albeit not producing anything of the quality as seen in the works of Adam.

Adam Willaerts oeuvre has long been neglected as the subject matter and style placed it outside the naturalistic painterly tendencies of the Dutch Golden Age. Yet, Adam's artistic connection with Roelant Savery and Paulus van Vianen in Utrecht place him in the heart of the early developments of painting in the Northern Netherlands.

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