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## Adam van BREEN

(Amsterdam 1585 – after 1642)

*Winter Scene with Skaters, the city of Middleburg in the distance.*

Oil on panel, 46 x 68 cm.

Monogrammed and dated lower right: *AVB.1.6.11*



*Provenance:* Collection George Fredrick (Fenton) Smith, Cromwell Lodge, Putney Hill;  
Sale George Frederick Fenton Smith, London (Christie's), 16 April 1910,  
lot 132;  
Art Dealer Dr. Nicolaes Beets, Amsterdam, 1932;  
Private Collection, Th. Rijkers, Amsterdam;  
Art Dealer Evert J.M. Douwes, (his Private Collection), Amsterdam. (c.1960-  
1988);  
Private Collection Netherlands, 1988 (purchased from the above).

*Exhibited:* *Tentoonstelling van Hollandische Winterlandschappen uit de 17<sup>e</sup> eeuw ten bate van het Rotterdamsche Crisis-Comite*, J. Goudstikker, Amsterdam, 1932,  
cat. no. 19, illustrated (Art Loss Register Certificate available, free of claim);  
*Tentoonstelling van Oude Meesters*, Kunsthandel Gebroeders Douwes,  
Amsterdam March-April 1962, no. 4, illustrated;  
*Zee-Rivier en Oevergezichten*, Museum Dordrecht, 1964, cat. no. 14, fig. 17;  
*Frozen Silence*, Kunsthandel K. & V. Waterman, Amsterdam, March 1982,  
Cat. no. 27;  
*Ijzige Stilte*, Provinciaal Museum, Zwolle, voorjaar 1982, cat. no. 27;  
*Van Jan Steen tot Jan Sluijters, De smaak van Douwes*, Fries Museum,  
Leeuwarden, 21 November 1998-21 February 1999.

*Literature:* J.G. van Gelder and N.F. van Gelder-Schrijver, "Adam van Breen, Schilder" in  
*Oudheidkundig Jaarboek I*, 1932, p. 11, 114, cat. No. 4, fig. 1 (with the remark:  
Haarlem in the background?);  
Laurens J. Bol, *Holländische Maler des 17 Jahrhunderts nahe den grossen  
Meistern*, 1969 Braunschweig, p. 157, ill. 148.

To this date the life of Adam van Breen remains a bit a mystery to us. Van Breen is identified in a document recording his wedding in The Hague to Maria Gelle on February 13, 1611. In 1612 he joined the Guild of Saint Luke in The Hague, to which he belonged until 1621. He was documented to have appeared before a bankruptcy court in Amsterdam in 1622 and in 1628.

These bankruptcy issues perhaps explain why Van Breen worked in Norway repeatedly, and even seems to have split his time between Amsterdam and Oslo for much of his career. In 1624 Van Breen went to Oslo for the first time to paint decorations for the palace of Christopher Urne, Lord of Akershus. He returned in 1636 and again in 1639 to produce more decorations for palaces being rebuilt by King Christian IV. Van Breen apparently worked in Norway until his death; his last signed painting, a portrait, is dated 1642.

What we know of Adam van Breen is based on these very few documents and on the body of work that remains today.

Although Van Breen painted a variety of subjects throughout his career, he is considered to have been a specialist of the Winter Landscape, painting wintry scenes filled with figures enjoying the pleasures of the ice. Occasionally these ice scenes depicted views of specific locations in Middelburg, Amsterdam or The Hague.

Van Breen may have received his training in Amsterdam with the landscape painter David Vinckboons (1576-c. 1632). In his early works Van Breen seems to have borrowed both settings and figures directly from Vinckboons's compositions. While in Amsterdam Van Breen was undoubtedly inspired by the renowned Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1634), who presumably also studied with Vinckboons and depicted winter scenes with crowded frozen canals.

To assess the value of painting by Adam van Breen in today's art market several elements have to be taken into consideration.

1. The artist seems to have been active as a painter of winter landscapes for a limited number of years only. From 1624 onwards, Adam van Breen worked mostly in Norway. There are no known winter scenes that are dated after the mid 1620's. He seems to have painted portraits and more decorative aspects of painting. Signed and dated Winter Landscapes by Adam van Breen are rare.

2. Adam van Breen while he must have been a celebrated artist in the early years of his career (this is based on a number of what seem to have been important commissions, high quality signed and dated winter landscapes between 1609-1615). But as van Breen relocated to Norway he was probably soon forgotten and in time paintings by van Breen were probably sold on as works by his acclaimed contemporaries David Vinckboons or Adriaen van de Venne.

3. Over the past 30 years perhaps 20 paintings by Adam van Breen have come onto the global Art Market. Of these works very few if any compare to our painting in subject, quality and condition.

4. Of the few paintings by Adam van Breen that present good comparison to our Winter Landscape the majority are to be found in museum collections:



Fig. 1. *A winter landscape with elegant skaters on a frozen lake, a town beyond.* oil on panel, 19½ x 34 1/8 in. (49.5 x 86.7 cm.) Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Fig. 2. *Skating on the Frozen Amstel River*, oil on panel, 43 x 65 cm. Dated 1611. National Gallery of Art Washington, acquired in 2010.



Fig. 3. *Pleasures of the Ice*, Oil on panel, 40 x 57.7 cm. Dated to c. 1615. Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen, Berlin.



Fig.4. *Landscape with frozen canal*, oil on panel, 47.5 x 91 cm. Signed and dated 1611. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Fig. 5. *Winter landscape, the Vijverberg in The Hague with Prins Maurits and his court*. Oil on panel, 71 x 131.8 cm. Signed and dated 1618.

Another 17<sup>th</sup> century specialist of Winter landscapes whose small oeuvre compares well to that of Adam van Breen is that of Adriaen van de Venne (1589-1662). His most iconic paintings are in museum collections (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Otterloo Collection- Center of Netherlandish Art Boston etc.) and are considered price-less.



Fig. 6. Adriaen van de Venne, oil on panel, 74 x 114 cm. Signed and dated. The painting was bought for a world record price (for the artist) of 2.600.000 dollars almost 15 years ago. Nothing that compares to this quality has been on the market since.