

C. G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

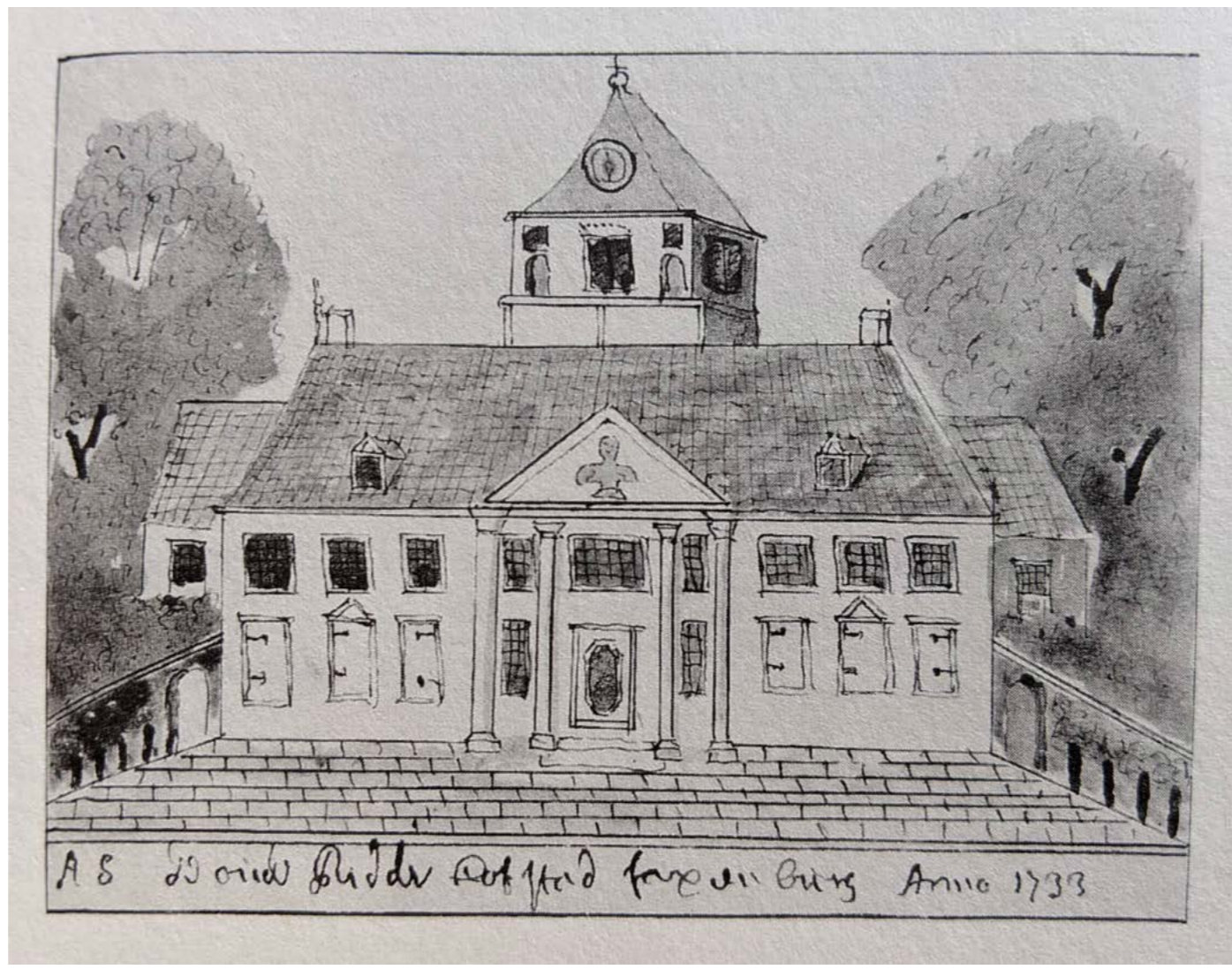
Distraction / Abwechslung
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Rembrandt did not paint many landscapes; and the few that exist are all imaginary. As a landscape draftsman, however, he “was one of the most brilliant and inventive of all artists; light and air vibrate between every stroke of his rapid sketches of the open Dutch countryside” (Michael Kitson). His etchings can be imaginary (like the densely wrought *Three Trees*, arguably his most “Baroque” landscape print) or naturalistic (like *Six’s Bridge*, the apparent spontaneity of which inspired the anecdote that it was rapidly jotted down directly on the copper plate *en plein air*).

All of Rembrandt’s twenty-four landscape etchings were created in two bursts of creativity during the 1640s. A print that has always stood out among the “naturalistic” ones is the so-called *Goldweigher’s Field*, known under this title since Gersaint published the first catalogue raisonné of Rembrandt’s prints in 1751.



The scene shows a view near Bloemendaal outside of Haarlem, making it the only topographical landscape print by Rembrandt that does not depict the immediate environs of Amsterdam. It is dominated by the wide-open expanse of dunes in the foreground that was typical for the area. Further behind, a small group of people can be seen working on bleaching fields. The town of Haarlem is recognizable by the massive Church of Saint Bavo in the far distance to the left, whereas the significant building with a square tower to the right is the Saxenburg house.



The Ancient Noble Estate of Saxenburg, Anno 1733 (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek)

The Saxenburg house was owned by Christoffel Thijsz, one of the heirs of Pieter Belten, from whom Rembrandt had bought his new Amsterdam townhouse in the Jodenbreestraat in 1639—a ruinous acquisition, as it turned out, since the artist was never able to pay it off. The print of 1651 might therefore have been made as a token of appeasement that, at best, only staved off the impending bankruptcy into which Rembrandt was ultimately forced in 1656.

As far as the traditional title *Goldweigher’s Field* is concerned, Gersaint might have just been mistaken, or he mixed up this view with another that is described as *Landscape with Trees, Farm Buildings, and a Tower* (Bartsch 223) and indeed shows the house of Receiver General (tax collector) Johannes Uytendogaert. Rembrandt’s etched portrait of him, dated 1639, is known as *The Goldweigher* (Bartsch 281), hence Gersaint’s misnomer.

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As can often happen with great artists, their creations manage to transcend the prosaic and even depressing circumstances under which they were created. This remarkable print serves as a fine example. In the words of the Metropolitan Museum’s legendary print curator A. Hyatt Mayor: “It is the only landscape in all art that wheels under the drive of invisible wind around a pivot on the horizon, as level lands seem to wheel when watched from a fast train. Only Rembrandt could have perceived such a turning from the crawl of a horse or coach.” Here, more than in many other prints by the artist, the strategically placed tufts of burr are essential for defining the depth of the composition. (When the burr is worn out in later impressions, the space tends to flatten out.) Both landscape and sky are given the same proportional weight in this sweeping vista, with the horizon line positioned exactly in the middle. Deploying a remarkable technical economy to great effect, Rembrandt manages to create what Cliff Ackley once called “the ultimate expression of the panorama in Dutch landscape art.”



The *Panorama near Bloemendaal* also belongs to the small group of Rembrandt’s landscape prints for which a related drawing survives. Now in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, it shows the same view from a somewhat different angle (and in reverse), again with Haarlem in the far distance and the Saxenburg house all the way over at the left edge of the sheet. While not a direct model for the print, the artist must have been looking at plein air studies such as this one when he etched the plate back in his studio.

An interesting footnote that pertains to the afterlife of both the drawing and our impression of the print is their ownership by the same collector, the London banker William Esdaile (1758–1837). His interests ranged widely from paintings to sculpture and even porcelain, yet he is foremost known for his extensive collection of drawings. As the present example shows, though, his prints should not be dismissed either.

Rembrandt

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