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## Rijksmuseum Attributes Six Works to a Dutch Old Master

By NINA SIEGAL SEPT. 16, 2016



“River Landscape With Figures” (1625-30), which the Rijksmuseum has recently attributed to the Dutch artist Hercules Segers. CreditPrivate Collection, via RIJKSMUSEUM

AMSTERDAM — Marc Dreesmann remembers well how his father, Anton, a third-generation department-store owner and art collector, hung a particular artwork in pride of place in the entryway of their home in Amsterdam.

The landscape painting of a river view, which Anton bought in 1987 from a Dutch art dealer, had been attributed for years to a little-known, but highly esteemed, Dutch 17th-century printmaker and painter, Hercules Segers. But it had been discredited in the 1970s by a top Segers scholar who said he was uncertain about its authenticity.

Still, Mr. Dreesmann recalled recently, his father “was very adamant that everyone had to see the picture and ohhh and ahhh and say how very Segers it was.” He added: “We were always believers.” In 2002, two years after his father died, Marc and his siblings sold their father’s art collection at Christie’s auction house in London, and Marc bought back the landscape for 94,000 pounds, or \$135,000 at the time.

His belief in the work has now been corroborated. New research has led the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to conclude that six new works — all of them in private collections, like Mr. Dreesmann’s — should be part of the Segers canon.

The museum has spent the past two years examining and conducting technical studies on about 100 known, and questioned, Segers paintings and prints all across the world. Among the newly authenticated paintings is “River Landscape with Figures,” which Mr. Dreesmann hangs in the entryway to his house near Antwerp, next to a copper concave mirror sculpture by the British artist Anish Kapoor.

“I’m excited, and I also feel a bit of vindication of my dad’s opinion,” said Mr. Dreesmann, who learned about the authentication of his work a few months ago. He hasn’t yet had the work reappraised. Henry Pettifer, head of the Old Master Paintings department at Christie’s in London, said that the authentication “could add value” to the work, but it is impossible to predict how much because works by Segers “so rarely appear at auction, and because there’s so much controversy about attribution.”

The Rijksmuseum is presenting the six works among 18 paintings, and 110 impressions of 44 prints in a large-scale retrospective, “Hercules Segers,” from Oct. 7 to Jan. 8. It will then move to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it will open on Feb. 13 as “The Mysterious Landscapes of Hercules Segers.” By presenting these “new” works to a list of about a dozen accepted Segers paintings in the world, the Dutch national museum has vastly expanded the oeuvre of one of the Golden Age’s most experimental and mysterious artists, who was admired by and influenced Rembrandt, among others.

Photo



The museum also attributed “Woodland Path” (1618-20) to Segers. CreditPrivate Collection, via RIJKSMUSEUM

“He’s one of the most innovative painters of the 17th century, who has an oeuvre smaller than that of Vermeer,” said Taco Dibbits, the director of the Rijksmuseum. “To be able to add to that oeuvre is just an amazing thing.”

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An Van Camp, assistant keeper of Northern European Art at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, who curated an exhibition of Segers prints at the British Museum in 2012, said she could not comment on the specific attributions until she had seen all the evidence. But she was impressed by the scope of the endeavor, which included infrared reflectography, X-ray fluorescence, ultraviolet photography and dendrochronological research, or tree-ring dating, which determines the date of the wood panels used for the paintings.

“It’s spectacular that the Rijksmuseum and the Metropolitan have done this research and mounted this exhibition, especially because it’s an artist that literally no one of the general public has heard of, and it’s a bit of a risk for them to stage this,” she said in a telephone interview. “This is the best research you can get with the tools available to us today.”

Other Segers scholars, including Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, professor emeritus of New York University, who was responsible for the authoritative

monograph of Segers' complete etchings, also declined to comment on the findings until they had a chance to look at the pictures and the evidence.

Segers could be thought of as a kind of Vincent van Gogh figure, born about 300 years earlier. The Dutch artist lived in quiet obscurity struggling to create a new visual language, rarely sold any of his work, and died penniless under mysterious circumstances. Born to a Flemish family in Haarlem in 1589, he apprenticed in Amsterdam, and spent his working life there and in Leiden, Utrecht and The Hague, where he died in 1640, apparently by falling down the stairs while drunk.

Like van Gogh, Segers experimented with materials and created haunting imagery, though his subject was almost always landscapes — some based on real places he'd seen and some that came straight from his imagination, with ghostly, craggy, vistas.

“In his play with material, and all the experiments he does you can really see that it's like a modern artist more or less,” said Huigen Leeftang, the Rijksmuseum's prints curator. “These landscapes are also very beautiful; you can really wander around and dream and fantasize.”

Photo



Marc Dreesmann, the Dutch art collector who owns “River Landscape with Figures.” CreditNina Siegal

Also like van Gogh, Segers was appreciated after his death both by his fellow artists of his own time, and generations of artists to come. His admirers include Rembrandt, who was born about 17 years after Segers, the German printmaker Alexander Friedrich and the Dada and Surrealist Max Ernst. The contemporary filmmaker [Werner Herzog](#) has called Segers “the father of modernity in art,” among those “great visionaries appear who seem to anticipate the course of our culture.”

This deep admiration is the subject of a simultaneous exhibition, planned in coordination with the Rijksmuseum, at the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam, “Under the Spell of Hercules Segers: Rembrandt and the Moderns,” also opening Oct. 7. Rembrandt owned eight works by Segers, and even used one of Segers’ etching plates, most likely bought at auction, as the basis of one of his own prints.

The research at the Rijksmuseum was conducted by Pieter Roelofs, the institution's paintings curator, and Mr. Leeflang, who are co-curators of the exhibition, with help from Arie Wallert from the University of Amsterdam. The researchers started by establishing a core oeuvre of undisputed works by Segers to get a sense of how he probably worked in his studio.

The Rijksmuseum owns only one painting by Segers on panel, and two oil sketches on canvas, but it possesses the largest collection of the artist's prints anywhere in the world, which were donated to the museum in 1708. Segers was known primarily as a printmaker, and there are more than 180 unique prints left of his work still extant, built up from 53 etching plates; the Rijksmuseum owns 74.

His paintings are far more rare. Many of them were previously attributed to artists such as Rembrandt, Jan van Goyen and Salomon van Ruysdael, often well into the 20th century. At the same time, the name Segers was often given to any unidentified landscape painting that had a similar look and appeared to be from the early 17th century. These six works will still need to be examined by outside scholars, who may yet have other opinions of them.

The newly minted "Segers" works are all on loan to the Rijksmuseum for the length of the retrospective, and two or three of them will be shown in New York. The other five private owners — all from Europe — have so far remained anonymous, and the Rijksmuseum said it did not know what their plans were for the works.

Mr. Dreesmann, like his father and his grandfather and great-grandfather before him, is an art collector; and his Segers painting is one of about 250 works he owns. He said that he has no plans to put "River Landscape with Figures" on the market any time soon.

"It goes to the Rijksmuseum and then to the Metropolitan," he said, "and then back home."