The landscapes of Rafel Govertsz. and Jochem Govertsz. Camphuisen at the hermitage

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In the rich collection of Dutch seventeenth century painting at the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad the art of the Camphuisens was formerly thought to be represented only by the more famous member of the family – Govert Dircksz Camphuisen. There are five pictures by this prolific painter – two interiors of a cattle-shed and three landscapes. But before this there was no record of any pictures by his two cousins, the brothers Rafel Govertsz. and Jochem Govertsz. Camphuisen.

At the present time, however, an opportunity appears to have arisen to acknowledge certain paintings in the Hermitage collection as works belonging to the brush of the above-mentioned two artists – a landscape by Rafel Govertsz. Camphuisen and two landscapes by Jochem Govertsz. Camphuisen.

Landscapes by the elder of the two brothers, Rafel Govertsz. (1597/1598—1657) are rather rare. The character of the more well-known paintings which depict winter scenes, landscapes at dusk, lit by the light of the moon or else a fire, is reminescent of Aert van der Neer’s manner and speaks of the links between these two artists. L. J. Bol and F. Bachmann are therefore justified in making assertions to this effect. But the latter, nevertheless, says the following about the work of Rafel Govertsz.: ‘Yet the individuality of this artist is actually hard to determine; among his pictures subscribed with his full signature there are some which bear very little resemblance to each other. This makes the artist’s creative personality very non-uniform’. And indeed the above-mentioned set of landscapes is quite different in character from the landscape bearing Rafel Govertsz. Camphuisen’s full signature that was put on sale in 1971 at the David Koetser Gallery in Zürich. The latter depicts wooded countryside in full daylight with the figures of a man on horseback and a beggar in the foreground. This picture from the D. Koetser Gallery made it possible for us to ascribe to the brush of Rafel Camphuisen a landscape of the Hermitage collection (fig. 1) which had been acquired from a private individual in 1947 as a painting of an unknown Dutch painter of the seventeenth century. These two paintings are very much alike in their composition – two groups of trees, a large one to the right, a smaller one to the left with a landscape in the distance between them. The identity of the way the trees are executed is obvious: leaves of oval shape are painted on long branches the out-
lines of which bear a strong resemblance to ostrich feathers. The lower foliage grows on branches horizontally arranged whereas the branches on top grow in clusters of two or three. The tree trunks are twisted in both pictures, gnarled and knotted. In the Hermitage picture there is a dead tree and dried branches rising above the green foliage. In the two pictures there is a similarity in the manner in which the notion of space is conveyed, long dark and light planes alternating in the background. A long light-coloroured strip of soil behind the trees lit by the sun with the dark tree-trunks standing out against it proved particularly helpful in the process of comparing the pictures.

The figures have obviously been executed by the same artist. The relationship of the figures and space is identical with the one exception that in the Hermitage painting the hunter on horseback is substituted in the immediate foreground by a young couple while he is depicted further back. The nature of the movements of the human figures and the hounds is similar too. In both pictures in the right background there is a tower with a spire. This subject is actually very frequent in Dutch landscapes and cannot serve as an argument when attributing a picture to the brush of a definite painter, however the manner of depiction of this motif is singular in both these pictures - the spire rises over a wall of dark greenery, moreover in the spot where

1 Rafel Govertsz. Camphuisen, Landscape. Panel, 41 × 71,5 cm. Leningrad, State Hermitage Museum.