

Koller Auktionen - Lot 3050*
A202 Old Master Paintings - Friday 23 September 2022, 02.00 PM



DENIJS VAN ALSLOOT and Studio

(c. 1570 Brussels c. 1626)

The Archduke Albrecht and Archduchess Isabella at an outdoor feast in Vivier d'Oye near Brussels.

Oil on canvas.

151 x 239.5 cm.

Provenance: - Sale Sotheby's, London, 3.7.1985, Lot 43 (as Denijs van Alsloot). - With Jan de Maere, Brussels, 1985. - European private collection. Literature: - Jan de Maere: Illustrated Dictionary of 17th Century Flemish Painters, vol. I, Brussels 1994, ill. pp. 24 and 85 (as Denis van Alsloot). - Sabine van Sprang: Denijs van Alsloot. Peintre paysagiste au service de la cour des archiducs Albert et Isabelle, Turnhout 2014, cat. no. FR10, plate 101 (as workshop)

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of Denijs van Alsloot and Antoon Sallaert). On 15 May 1615, at the annual shooting competition of the crossbowmen of the 'Grand Serment' — one of the most prestigious guilds in Brussels — Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain shot down the bird (the 'papegai') attached to the top of the spire of the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon in Brussels. She was proclaimed Queen of the guild and the occasion was celebrated over multiple days. Isabella and Albert VII of Austria, rulers of the Catholic Spanish Netherlands, wanted to place a special light on these festivities that had brought the court and the whole city together. To this end, they commissioned Denijs van Alsloot, amongst others, with a series of eight monumental paintings that were to depict the most memorable moments of the celebrations and that were displayed from 1620 onwards in the great gallery of the castle of Tervuren, one of the favourite residences of the Dukes of Brabant. The participation of Infanta Isabella in the archery competition of the 'Grand Serment' crossbowmen of Brussels was part of a long-standing tradition. For over a century, the guild had been inviting the Duke of Brabant to this annual event. After the religious and political turmoil that had beset the Province of Brabant in the second half of the 16th century, the celebrations surrounding Isabella's victory were highly symbolic and in a sense represented tangible proof of normalisation and a new era of prosperity. At the festival at the Vivier d'Oye, the military guilds of Brussels march to the right of the pond with a flag bearing the Cross of Burgundy. Several members of the crossbowmen's guild can be seen. Games are already taking place on the water, while spectators from all sides jostle to get a good place to view the spectacle. The archducal couple attends the festivities in the leafy pavilion at the right edge of the pond. Their central, yet isolated position, a simultaneous expression of both affection and superiority over their citizenry, fits perfectly with the contemporary image of sovereignty and its ideals of prudence and moderation. The medallion with the image of the Virgin and Child on the left bank of the pond seems to suggest that the water spectacle may have been entrusted to the guild of poets called the 'Guirlande de Marie'. The Sonian Forest (Forêt de Soignes), the setting for these festivities located just to the southeast of Brussels, was

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Habsburg hunting ground and had played a major role in the choice of Brussels as the residence for the Dukes of Burgundy and their successors. The selection of this location to celebrate the victory of the crossbow competition by the Habsburg and excellent huntress Isabella of Spain emphasised the longstanding close ties between the city and the court. Albert VII and Isabella Clara Eugenia had already appointed the artist Denijs van Alsloot as the official painter of their court in Brussels around 1600. His task was to record their possessions for posterity and to depict the festivities and processions that took place during their reign. For his figural compositions, Alsloot often collaborated with Hendrick de Clerck (1570–1629), Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) and especially with Antoon Sallaert (1594–1650), as in the work offered here. Van Alsloot's role in the series of festivities resembles that of a contractor — delegating parts of the execution to his workshop, even if he was engaged in them himself. Sallaert had also been involved in this commission from the outset and can be considered an equal creator. In the Netherlands, subcontracting had been common in painting since the 15th century, and external labour was usually paid per piece or per day. Van Alsloot was famous for his wooded landscapes, especially his views of the Forêt de Soignes. His forest depictions are characterised by bright, soft colours and greater precision than the works of the older Flemish master Gillis van Coninxloo (1544–1607), who also influenced his work. The play of light in the foliage of the beech trees is reduced to the essentials, aiming for the greatest possible effect from a distance. The first version of our painting, signed by Denijs van Alsloot, dated 1616, monogrammed by Antoon Sallaert and located in the Archdukes' collection at castle of Tervuren from 1620 onwards, is today in the collection of the Museo del Prado in Madrid (inv. no. 2570; see Van Sprang 2014, cat. no. F8, plate 96). The works from the series that depict the Ommeganck, a type of medieval procession, held in Brussels on 31 May 1615 are also in the Museo del Prado (inv. nos. P001347 and P001348). Further works from the series are located in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (inv. nos. 5928-1859, 168-1885 and 169-1885). Another version of our painting depicting the festivities at Vivier d'Oye is in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts

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de Belgique in Brussels (oil on canvas, 120 × 322 cm, inv. no. 3446). There is every indication that our version and the Brussels version were painted under the supervision of Van Alsloot and Sallaert, and were directly inspired by the original painting in the Prado. In fact, the history of the first version indicates that it certainly remained in the Netherlands and possibly even in the studio of one of the artists until 1620, thus allowing sufficient time for replicas to be produced. In this regard, it should be noted that no other public festival from the period of Albert and Isabella led to such an extensive production of commemorative works, and it can be assumed that everyone involved in the 1615 celebrations had a souvenir: the Spanish King Philip III, the Archdukes, the city of Brussels, the crossbowmen of the Great Oath and even the town citizens, who received a print.

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