



BAREND AVERCAMP

(1612 - Kampen - 1679)

"Skaters, Kolf players *, elegant ladies and gentlemen, children playing, a horse-drawn sledge and ice-bound boats on a frozen moat, outside the walls of IJsselstein"

on panel: 56,5 x 89 cm; signed (l.l. on the sledge).
Painted circa 1645-1655;

* The men are competing in the Dutch game of "kolf", similar to today's game of golf but played on ice. They are holding a so-called 'Scottish klick' (=Club), which was different from the Dutch club, being anchored with a lead ball at the bottom. They aim at the up-turned boat. You can score points when hitting one of the horizontal compartments of the boat. Two markers (markers/linesmen) are standing by to take score. The taller man on the right of the kolf players is the notary (the main referee). The short man on the left, wearing a rather oversized coat, carries alcoholic beverages for the competitors and referees in the lining of his coat. To the far right, an elegant couple watches closely, him possibly being the captain of the team. (*Literature: 'Serendipity of Early Golf', by Mr Bargmann.*)

**Literature:**

Welcker, C.J., *Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1645) & Barent Avercamp (1612-1679) Schilders tot Campen*, revised edition, 1979, pp. 333-334, nos. B.A. S 17 and B.A.S 21.1;
A. Blankert, D. Hensbroek-vd Poel et al, '*Hendrick Avercamp, Barent Avercamp, Frozen Silence: Paintings from Museums and Private Collections*', Amsterdam, 1982.

Provenance:

Dr Hülsmann, Wiesbaden, 1907;
Reg. Rat Schippers, Wiesbaden;
Bernhard Albert Mayer, Mainz, until 1934;
Sale, Gemäldesammlung Kom.-Rat Bernhard Albert Mayer, Mainz, Werke niederländischer Meister des 17. Jahrhunderts, Paul Graupe, Berlin, 25 June 1934, lot 2, illustrated in black and white;
Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam, August-September 1934;
Galerie Moos, Geneva, Collections Jan W. Vos Amsterdam, H. Schauwecker Bruxelles, 7 December 1935, lot 4, illustrated at plate 2;
Kunsthandel W. Paech, Amsterdam, 1936, no.1;
H. Schrijver Jr., Castellaras, France, 1976;
Sale, Old Master Paintings, Sotheby's, London, 3 July 1997, as 'Property from a European Private Collection', lot 30, illustrated in colour;
Johnny van Haeften Ltd, London, in December 1997 and Newhouse Galleries Inc., New York, 1997/98; Exhibited at TEFAF 1998, where purchased by an important Dutch collector, on behalf of the Foundation Oikonomos Beheer in The Netherlands.
Douwes Fine Art, Amsterdam, 2013
Private collection, the Netherlands

Exhibited:

K. & V. Waterman, Provinciehuis, Zwolle, '*Hendrick Avercamp, Barent Avercamp, Frozen Silence: Paintings from Museums and Private Collections*', 1982, no. 18, p.120, ill. p. 121;
Johnny Van Haeften Ltd, London, December 1997, no. 4, illustrated in colour.
TEFAF Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2016
Zuiderzeemuseum, Enkhuizen, the Netherlands 'Winterkoorts', 3 dec 2021 – 13 March 2022
The painting is accompanied by a letter that reads: To whom it may concern: This letter confirms that descendants of the late Bernhard Albert Mayer of Mainz have irrevocably transferred all rights, title, or interest in and to the painting by Barent Avercamp (or any other attribution that may be given in the future) entitled, Skaters, Kolf players, elegant ladies and gentlemen, a horse-drawn sledge and ice-bound boats on a frozen moat outside the city walls of Kampen, signed lower left, oil on panel, 56.3 x 88.8cm, ca. 1645-55, which was Lot 2 at the sale of the Painting Collection of Kom.-Rat. Bernhard Albert Mayer, Mainz, Works of 17th century Dutch Masters, Auction 136".



Notes:

Barend Avercamp (1612 - Kampen - 1679) shared his uncle Hendrick's (1585 – Kampen – 1634) gift for storytelling, imagining lively encounters between figures venturing on the ice as soon as temperatures dropped and canals and rivers froze over. His paintings invite repeated viewing to discover all of their surprises and amusements.

Between the fourteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, the Northern Hemisphere experienced a climatic shift known as the Little Ice Age, with frequent severe winters that often arrived early and lasted well into spring. The deep freeze could have large consequences on a town and its people. During these harsh winter months when barges, boats, carriages, and wagons might all be rendered useless. The current painting marvellously demonstrates how the Dutch resorted to ingenious ways of transporting good, and themselves, on frozen waterways in a country marked by hundreds of canals and rivers, while having fun in the process.

Sleds of all types carried children, goods, and animals. Some were utilitarian but others were elegant and colourful, like the one depicted in the middle of the ice scene. A horse in an expensive harness, probably shod with special shoes, pulls a sleigh with gilding and ornate carving, allowing its passengers to travel in comfort and style. A man on a small sled, individually manned and propelled with spikes, barely escapes its hoofs. Men behind the sleigh see it all happen and pull up their mantels to shield themselves from the blistering cold. A little closer up we see two children in another type of sled. It is pushed by an elegantly dressed woman on ice-skates. She is accompanied by a man carrying a large pole, a precursory measurement to help people get out of the water in case they broke through the ice, a not infrequent occurring event.

Ice-skating was of course the most popular pastime. The Dutch had taken up skating as early as the Middle Ages. The earliest skates were carved out of the bones of animals but in the fifteenth century long metal blades were strapped onto shoes. Another favourite pastime, much to the dismay of bystanders randomly hit by flying balls, would be the Dutch game of "kolf". On the left we see some men enjoying themselves in competing in this game, being closely watched by an elegant couple conversating on the right riverbank. The man possibly being their captain. Kolf is similar to today's game of golf but played on ice. They aim at the up-turned boat, hitting one of the horizontal compartments of the boat in order to score points. Two marquers (markers/linesmen) are standing by at the riverbank to take score. The taller man on the right of the kolf players, dressed in clack, is the notary (the main referry). A short man accompanies them on the left, wearing a rather oversized coat. Underneath, in the lining of his coat, he carries alcoholic beverages to keep the competitors and referees warm during the game. In the distance, near the Watergate and the wooden crane, we notice another game played on the ice: a sort of jeu-de-boules.



When looking at the painting the figures in the scenery seem to blend together. Closer observation, however, reveals a great diversity of type: we see young and old, peasants, tradesmen, burghers, and aristocracy mingled. Although Barend focused on the diversions and pleasures of winter, he also reveals a juxtaposition between those fortunate enough to have leisure to enjoy the ice and those whose livelihood was made more difficult by it. For many it meant business had to continue. In the utmost left of the painting we see a farmer and his wife occupied with the more prosaic task of transporting their goods on a sled to sell them in town. To the right of the upturned boats we see a chestnut seller. The boy in front of him is holding out his hat to receive the chestnuts the seller is weighing in a copper scale, while the boy's mother tucks her hand under her apron to warm them. Totally on the right we see a fisherman with mittens. He is holding the axe he needs to cut a hole in the ice, before he can throw in the net he is carrying over his shoulder. Behind him, two of his colleagues are carrying a fish basket balanced between poles on their shoulders to the market in town.

Besides the people in this merrymaking skating scene, the architecture is a prominent element of the composition. When comparing the backdrop with two drawings by Esaias van de Velde (Amsterdam 1587 – 1630 The Hague) (image 1 and 2), it becomes clear that Barend must have been strongly inspired by them. Especially copied details from the drawing of 1621 (image 1), like the group of boats on the left side bank, suggest he had seen and studied it meticulously and used it as an example for his painting.ⁱ It is very likely that Barend was familiar with the work of Esaias van de Velde. His uncle Hendrick Avercamp presumably spent his apprenticeship in Amsterdam with the Antwerp master Gillis van Coninxloo (1544 – 1607) at the same time as Esaias van de Velde and Hercules Seghers studied with van Coninxloo.ⁱⁱ

The city walls depicted in the two drawings and the painting were until today cause for some confusion. They were often considered to be a representation of IJsselstein. However, after inspection of images with seventeenth-century city views of Kampen, including old maps, we have come to the conclusion that the city defences in this painting are a representation of those in Kampen. When carefully comparing the drawing to a print by Abraham Rademaker from the city of Ysselstein (image 3), we can conclude that the two drawings by Van de Velde must have been in part inspired by the city defences of Kampen and not IJsselstein.ⁱⁱⁱ It is known that Esaias van de Velde often used his imagination when depicting existing architecture but that he nonetheless usually represented (parts of) this architecture clearly enough to be identified. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Barend Avercamp himself also has travelled to Ysselstein, and indeed Esaias' drawing seems to be the archetype for the backdrop in his painting.



In the backdrop of this painting, roofs of houses of the skyline village appear, in contrast with the blue sky. They were first drawn in a certain spot on the panel and later painted as the artist decided to slightly change their position. Through this process of drawing and re-painting, or *pentimenti* as these artistic adjustments are called, we can follow the artist's working process and see the originality of the artist's hand. In 1936 this painting was with Walter Paech, art dealer and restorer in Amsterdam. After comparing two photographs in the documentation of the RKD - Netherlands Institute of Art History and tracing the provenance of this painting, we have concluded that during restoration Paech must have painted over several elements of the composition, probably to make it more suitable to sell in the art market.

The first to 'disappear' was the top section of the round tower in the middle, between the water gate and the land gate, which looks like an opened hatch. Paech must have thought this asymmetrical architectural element to be either a mistake by the artist or simply unpleasant to the eye. However it may be, it is also present on the drawing by van de Velde and appeared not to be an artistic mistake but a historically common feature in defence structures. A semi-circular tower like the one depicted protruded for three-quarters outside the fortification wall, for the purpose of the installation of flanking artillery. To prevent the artillery from needing to clumsily enter the roof by climbing through a manhole or hatch, the tower staircase would be slightly extended above floor level; an extension clearly visible in the top section of the tower in the current painting. The extended staircase also had the bonus of momentarily sheltering the soldiers from the enemy's eye and their hostile fire.

The second feature that felt out of favour with Paech was the man doing his needs under the city wall on the left side. People doing their needs in public must have been a common sight in the seventeenth century. We often see upturned boats fulfilling the purpose of a public lavatory in both the Avercamp artist's paintings. When the painting was still overpainted, it puzzled the Art dealer Douwes Fine Art what the three boys were doing who were so clearly depicted on top of the left city wall. However, during the restoration of the painting the squatting man appeared, and it became clear that the boys were throwing down rocks in an attempt to annoy the unsuspecting victim.

Because of the overpainting it was for a long time supposed that there were two paintings with an almost identical subject, and therefore gave way for misunderstanding. The last time this painting was published with an illustration in its authentic state was in 1935, when it came to auction in Geneva. After this auction, the painting came in the possession of Walter Paech who altered it as described above. In her renowned book (republished in 1979) treating both Hendrick and Barend Avercamp, Clara Welcker wrongly mentions the existence of two different versions of the composition of this painting. It was only in 1997 that this misunderstanding was clarified, after restoration of the painting to its original form by the art dealer Johnny van Haeften in London.



The Dutch painter Barend Avercamp was born in Kampen in 1612.^{iv} He was a pupil of his uncle Hendrick Avercamp (1585 – Kampen – 1634). Barend spent most of his life in Kampen except for two extended periods, first in Zwolle (1615-1626) and later in Zutphen (1640-1649).

The work of Barend is unquestionably influenced by that of his uncle and teacher Hendrick. Both had a predilection for winter landscapes with architectural structures appearing in the background. It is probable that Barend was involved in the production of workshop paintings in his uncle's studio from as early as the late 1620's. In his later years he earned his living for the most part as a timber merchant, tin smith and a shareholder in a mill. His first dated work is from 1633 and the last one dates from 1663. He became member of the guild of St. Luke in Kampen and was even appointed head (deacon) of this guild in 1656, 1662 and 1677. Barend also held many other public positions, amongst others as a public and an ecclesiastical officer. He died in 1679 in Kampen.

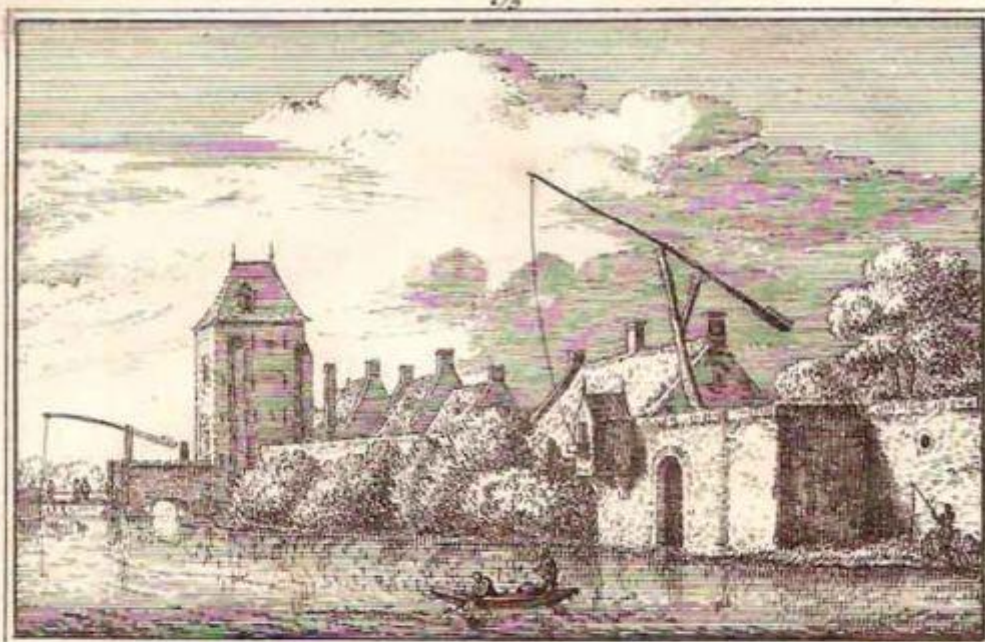
For a long time, Barend's paintings have been attributed to his uncle Hendrick, even though his artistic activities were known from archival documents. In the early 1920s, Clara Welcker, then keeper of the archives of Kampen, suggested that paintings dated after 1634 (year of death of Hendrick Avercamp) or signed 'Avercamp' or 'B. Avercamp' should be attributed to Barend instead of to Hendrick Avercamp, and thus ascribed a small group of works to Barend Avercamp. She noted that although the styles are closely related, differences can be observed. Barend's figures are more prominent and his use of colour is darker than Hendrick's, also Barend's positioning of the horizon is lower than that of his uncle Hendrick.



Esaias van de Velde I (1587-1630), View of the Buitenhaven of Kampen with the tower of the Buitenkerk at centre, 1621, graphite, with brown wash; framing line in dark brown ink., 134 x 193 mm, Signed and dated at lower right, in graphite, E.V. VELDE 1621, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv.no. DYCE.399.

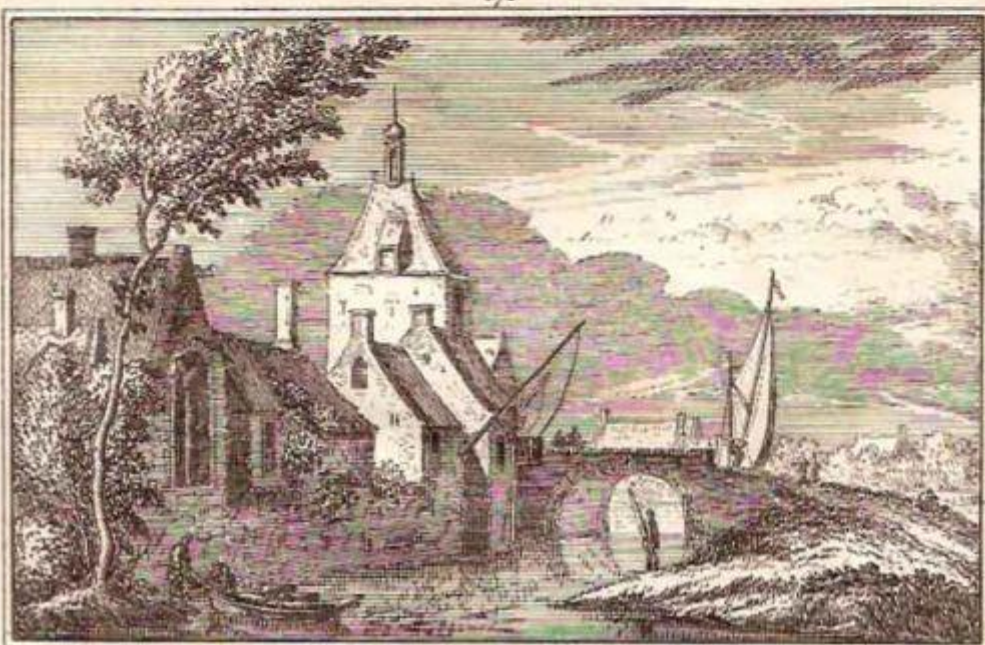


Esaias van de Velde I (1587-1630), Fortified town (Kampen?), paper, black chalk, grey wash, 192 x 312 mm, signed at lower middle, E.V. VELDE, Private collection, The Hague, The Netherlands.



POORT tot YSSELSTEIN

1630



By de IJſel POORT tot YSSELSTEIN

1631

Copperplate engraving by Abraham Rademaker (1676/77 – 1735), “Gate to Ysselstein & Near the Ysselgate to Ysselstein” from the book “Kabinet van Nederlandsche outheden en gezichten”, published in Amsterdam in 1725.



i See for comparison: two drawings by Esaias van de Velde, Fortified Town, black chalk, grey wash; 192 x 312 mm; signed l.l. 'E V VELDE', private collection The Netherlands and Fortified Town, graphite, grey brown wash; 135 x 193 mm; signed and dated l.r. 'E.V.VELDE 1621'; London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv./ cat. nr. DYCE.399

ii P. Roelofs et al., exhib. cat. Hendrick Avercamp, De meester van het ijsgezicht, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) & Wasington (National Gallery of Art) 2010, pp. 31-32.

iii A. Rademaker, Kabinet van Nederlandsche Outheden en Gezichten, Amsterdam 1725, II, fig. CLXXIII.

iv See C.J. Welcker, Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1645) & Barent Avercamp (1612-1679) Schilders tot Campen, revised edition, 1979.

We are grateful to the RKD - Netherlands Institute of Art History, The Hague, for helping us determine the architecture and provenance of this painting in March 2014.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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