

---

cat. no. 2

**Jan Ekels the Elder**

1724 – Amsterdam – 1781

*View of the Dam, Amsterdam*

Signed lower left: J.Ekels

Oil on canvas

37.5 x 49 cm.

**Provenance:**

Spain, private collection

The present, hitherto unpublished painting, is a beautiful example of the work of Jan Ekels, in which he depicts the Dam in Amsterdam from a unique point of view. The Dam square is not only the historic heart of Amsterdam, but is also the nation's epicentre. Its 4.5 acres, paved with 2.5 million cobblestones, are associated with a plethora of events and memories. Many meticulously rendered figures, going about their everyday business, enliven the present scene, depicted in golden afternoon light. The buildings, as well as the figures with their various activities, like trading, give this painting fascinating historical value. At the left the Town Hall (now the Royal Palace), acts as a *repoussoir*, while the Waag (weigh house) stands to the left of middle, and on the right the Damrak and the Commander's House ('t Huisje onder het Zeil' – 'The House under the Sail'), which was built in 1599, are seen. The wooden building to the left of the Commander's House is the office of the fish market,<sup>1</sup> while the church tower rising above the houses on the Damrak belongs to the Oude Kerk. The Waag (weigh-house) was originally built in 1565 in dark blue stone, with the purpose of weighing goods from overseas, before they were traded at the stock market, which was also at the Dam. This Renaissance building had seven doors on the ground floor, with an imposing stairway at the front leading to the first floor, which was originally the 'Soldaaten wachthuys'. Flanking the stairs two stone lions were displayed with the coat of arms of Amsterdam

and Holland.<sup>2</sup> The Waag was renovated in 1775-1777, but finally demolished in 1808 by order of Louis Bonaparte who, upon taking up residence in the newly converted Royal Palace, complained that his view was obstructed. In front of the Waag a number of barrels are laid out, displaying the city's beer trade. These barrels are being transported by horse-drawn sledges or in boats, visible on the Damrak.

Jan Ekels the Elder was born in Amsterdam, where he was apprenticed to the landscape painter Dirck Dalens III (1688-1753). He specialized primarily in cityscapes and found his inspiration in the paintings of the seventeenth-century pioneers of the genre, Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-1698), Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712) and Jacob van Ruisdael (c.1628-1670). Particularly Ruisdael's *The Dam with the Weigh House at Amsterdam*, now in the collection of the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (fig.1), seems to underlie the present composition.<sup>3</sup> Together with Isaak Ouwater (1753-1793), Hendrick Keun (1738-1788) and Jan ten Compe (1713-1761), Ekels was one of the leading painters of urban views in the eighteenth century, depicting scenes of everyday life in several Dutch cities. Ten Compe was Ekels's fellow pupil in Dalens' workshop. Jan Ekels the Younger (1759-1793) became a painter as well and is mostly known for his scenes from every day life as well as such allegorical themes as the Five Senses.





Fig. 1 Jacob van Ruisdael, *The Dam with the Weigh House at Amsterdam*, c. 1670, oil on canvas, 52 x 65 cm., Berlin, Gemäldegalerie



Fig. 2 Jan Ekels the Elder, *View of the Dam in Amsterdam*, oil on panel, 48 x 62.5 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Another *View of the Dam, Amsterdam* by Ekels is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Twente, Enschede.<sup>4</sup> This painting is dated 1772 and painted from another viewpoint: the Waag on the left and the Town hall on the right. A painting from almost the same point of view as the present work is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, although without the Commander's House (fig. 2). The Amsterdam Museum holds five paintings by Ekels with different views of Amsterdam, but none representing the Dam. A contemporary, more panoramic bird's eye view in print by the German printmaker Georg Balthasar Probst (1732-1801), provides a nice overall shot of the scene (fig. 3).

WB

#### Notes

- 1 This office is known as *Comptoir van het Sint Pietersgilde*.
- 2 In 1617, the former city gate on Nieuwmarkt square was re-purposed as a weigh house, to relieve the weigh house on Dam square, which had become too small for the needs of the rapidly growing city.
- 3 A drawing by Ruisdael in the collection of Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels *View of the Dam and Old Church at Amsterdam* served as a preliminary study for the Berlin picture. See S. Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: A complete catalogue of his paintings, drawings and etchings*, New Haven/London 2001, pp. 520-521, cat. nos. figs. D37, D38. Ruisdael painted three other views of the Damrak seen from the square but without the prominent Weigh House: now in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam and in The Frick Collection, New York, See Slive 2001 cat. nos. 6, 8, 7.
- 4 Jan Ekels, *View of the Dam in Amsterdam*, signed and dated 1772, oil on panel, 48 x 60.5 cm., inv. no. 637.



Fig. 3 Georg Balthasar Probst, *A View of Dam Square*, engraving, hand-coloured, c. 1750, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief





Detail of cat.no. 2