

17 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–69)

The Three Trees, 1643

Etching. 213 × 280 mm

Bartsch 212; Hind 205, only state

This highly worked masterpiece greatly appealed to the taste of the eighteenth century: in 1751 Gersaint called it the 'best and most finished' of all Rembrandt's landscapes. At the Barnard sale in 1798 an impression was sold for 8 guineas to Hibbert, more than any other landscape with the exception of the *Coach Landscape* (see cat. 18). The view is thought to have been taken near Amsterdam, near the Diemerdijk, but is given a heightened significance. It includes all kinds of easily overlooked detail such as the two lovers, barely visible, snuggling in the bushes in the right foreground.

Cracherode possessed only one impression of this print, which enables it to be identified in the 1837 inventory as F.5–164. At the left can be seen the stamp of Robert Dighton (L.727) who stole it in 1806 (see p. 49). In his letter to the Trustees dated 10 July 1806 (see Appendix E) Philipe thought that Dighton had substituted impressions: 'The three Trees landscape is very ordinary at the Museum, while that at Mr Conant's [i.e. the one recovered from Dighton] is a jewel of the first water. This is a celebrated print, and certain I am that Mr Cracherode would not have been satisfied with an ordinary impression when he had opportunities of procuring the best.'

1973 U.967 (=F.5–164). Cracherode collection