LOT 37
PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROSE BAUWENS & JOSEPH CAPEL

RENÉ MAGRITTE
1898 - 1967

L'ÉCOLE BUISSONNIÈRE

signed Magritte (lower left); signed Magritte, titled and dated 1946 on the reverse
gouache on paper
40.3 by 59.1cm.
15 7/8 by 23 1/4 in.
Executed in 1946.

ESTIMATE £250,000-350,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 249,000 GBP

The authenticity of this work has been confirmed by the Comité Magritte.

PROVENANCE
Rose Bauwens & Joseph Capel, Argentina (a gift from the artist in 1960)
Thence by descent to the present owners

EXHIBITED
(possibly) Brussels, Galerie Dietrich, Magritte, 1946, no. 3

LITERATURE

Le Fait accompli, no. 34-5, Brussels, April 1970, illustrated in an installation photograph of the Galerie Dietrich exhibition


CATALOGUE NOTE

Painted in 1946 and for many years known only through drawings in Magritte’s correspondence, L’Ecole buissonnière represents an exciting rediscovery and is testament to one of the many ‘unsung’ friendships of the Surrealist movement. The work was given by the artist to Rose and Joseph Capel when it transpired that another of his paintings that they owned was too damaged for him to repair; Magritte sent them the present gouache and it has remained in their family ever since. Rose Bauwens Capel was the editor of Le ciel bleu, a Belgian hebdomadaire published in 1945 which featured articles and illustrations by a variety of international Surrealists. Contributors included André Breton and Pablo Picasso as well as Magritte, who wrote two articles in total. In a series of letters between Magritte and Capel, the artist expresses his sorrow over the damaged painting as well as discussing his own ideas and the work of fellow-Surrealists Dalí and Ernst. They offer a vivid insight into the network of ideological exchanges that underpinned the Surrealist movement.

In L’Ecole buissonnière, Magritte returned to a number of motifs that occur throughout his pre-war œuvre, including the street lamps and tall red-roofed buildings typical of suburban Belgian towns which also feature in the Empire des lumières series of 1949-54. The addition of a theatre stage introduces a complex play on scale and provides the all-important element of mystery. Magritte refers to the image of a stage in his 1946 Titres thus: ‘the idea of wandering is applied here to objects. Life is no longer represented on a theatre stage, the wandering imagination sees life as a spectacle’ (quoted in D. Sylvester (ed.), op. cit., p. 325). Magritte painted a few subsequent versions of this scene which retain this basic iconography with slight modifications but the presence of a multitude of windows with the curtains drawn is unique to the present work and confers an ominous character which is belied by the airy bright blue sky.

The composition appears in an illustration the artist sent to Marcel Mariën in August 1946 beneath the inscription ‘I have some ideas for sunlit pictures’ (ibid., p. 325). Mariën described the effect of these works in the third edition of Le ciel bleu: ‘playing with colour and light, [Magritte] sharpens our nostalgia and invites us to action, placing in front of our eyes – nowadays so given over to misery and fear – a vision of the true measure of man, where there is nothing but order and beauty’ (M. Mariën, in Le ciel bleu, no. 3, 8th March 1945, translated from French).