LOT 33
PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION
HERRI MET DE BLES
BOUVINES CIRCA 1510 - AFTER 1550 ANTWERP (?)
AN EXTENSIVE ROCKY LANDSCAPE WITH THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT
signed with the owl device lower centre
oil on oak panel
44 by 74.3 cm.; 17 ¼ by 19 ¼ in.

ESTIMATE 300,000-500,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 361,250 GBP

PROVENANCE
Possibly the 2nd Lord Northwick, Thirlestane House, Cheltenham;
His deceased sale on the premises, Philips, 26ff July 1859, either lot 914 or 1777;
Bought back at the sale by his nephew the 3rd Lord Northwick, at Northwick Park by 1864;
His widow, Lady Northwick;
By whom bequeathed to her grandson Captain E.G. Spencer-Churchill, 1912;
His deceased sale, London, Christie's, 28 May 1965, lot 47, for 7,500 Guineas to Hallsborough;
M.A. Hassid, Esq.;
With Hallsborough Gallery, London, 1970;
From whom acquired in 1970 by Günter and Anneliese Henle, Duisburg;
Their sale, London, Sotheby's, 3 December 1997, lot 30, for £133,500 to De Jonckheere;
With Galerie de Jonckheere, Paris, by whom sold to the present collector.

EXHIBITED
Bristol, 1937, no. 187;
London, Royal Academy, Flemish Art 1300-1700, Winter 1953-4, no. 154;
Namur, Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois, Autour de Henri Bles, 13 May-1 November 2000, no. 12.

LITERATURE
A Catalogue of the Pictures, Works of Art, etc. at Northwick Park, 1864 (reprinted 1908), no. 41, as by 'Nieulant,'
T. Borenius, A Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures at Northwick Park, 1921, no. 112;
M.J. Friedländer, Early Netherlandish Painting: From Van Eyck to Bruegel, London 1956, reproduced fig. 186;
L. Van Puyvelde, La peinture flamande au siècle de Bosch et de Bruegel, Paris 1962, p. 227;
W.S. Gibson, 'Mirror of the Earth.' The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting, Princeton 1989, pp. 30, 102, note 126;

CATALOGUE NOTE
Herri met de Bles was the principal follower of Joachim Patinir, the pioneer of landscape painting. He is probably better known to us than other landscape painters of his day, because he was prolific, and because many of his works are signed with a small owl – a Civetta in Italian - which was his nickname. Max Friedlander seems to have been the first to recognize the signature in the form of the artist's owl device in this painting. He must have been helped in so doing by the figure of Joseph, who is gazing at the owl and points it out with his arm.

Herri's landscapes, always painted in soft pastel tones, are consistent in style and in the delight in he took in repeating motifs. As Serck pointed out in the catalogue of the exhibition devoted to the artist, the row of cottages in the extreme right is repeated in the landscape backgrounds of several other works by Herri, including two versions of The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Namur and Naples.¹ The fantastic rocky outcrop leaning to the right and pierced with arched openings and with monks ascending a steep rocky path to a hermitage is a motif that derives from Patinir, but which recurs with variations in a number of works by Herri, including a St Jerome also in Namur.² Herri's landscapes are always wild and exotic, with craggy mountains and distant fertile plains. Usually there is a distant city and an inlet of the sea extending to a faraway horizon of blue mountains; these are what is known to art historians as 'World Landscapes' in which the infinity of distance is emphasized and a broad sweep of landscape encompasses the sum of known geography.

Since none of them are dated, it is very difficult to hazard a chronology of his work, which is remarkably consistent, allowing for little obvious maturing of style. He was probably the Herry de Patinir who registered as an apprentice in Antwerp in 1540, but we have no idea when he ceased to paint.

². Namur, Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois, inv. 158; see Serck under literature, 2000, pp. 226-7, no. 35, reproduced.