Kees van Dongen (Dutch/French, 1877-1968)

Cavaliers dans les bois
c.1906
oil on canvas
41 x 33 cm (16⅛ x 13 in.)
signed 'van Dongen' (lower left)

Provenance:
Madame Boris Kniazeff
Knoedler & Co, New York (acquired from the above on 30 July 1953) (stock no. A 5405)
J.H. Griffin (acquired from the above on 4 November 1953)
Sale: Galerie Charpentier Paris, 9 December 1959, no. 27 (illustrated pl. X, titled Les Cavaliers au Bois de Boulogne)
Private collection, France
Private collection, France (bequeathed by the above)
Thence by descent

Notes:
This work will be included in the forthcoming Van Dongen Digital Catalogue Raisonné, currently being prepared under the sponsorship of the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc.

Following his successful debut with Galerie Vollard in 1904 and participation at the Salon d'Automne the year after, it was only natural that van Dongen's career continued to progress rapidly throughout 1906. Already acquainted with André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck, van Dongen also held a studio with neighbour, Pablo Picasso (fig. 1 - a cavalier by van Dongen hangs to the left of Picasso) at Le Bateau-Lavoir, a popular rendez-vous for creatives in the heart of Montmartre. It was during this period that van Dongen delved further into Fauvism from Pointillism and developed a personal style which differentiated him from his peers.

The present work demonstrates van Dongen's signature use of bright Fauve colours with earthy undertones. Although the blurred edges release the subjects from the restraints of realism, the route to total abstraction is diverted by the use of a few, block colours to help distinguish one subject from another.

Van Dongen began recording the Bois de Boulogne (a public park in Western Paris) and its visitors in 1905-6 (fig. 2 & 3). As a result of his fascination with this subject, the artist lived in Villa Said in the Bois de Boulogne between 1915 and 1921. With inspiration only a stone's throw away, his artistic career became more successful than ever and van Dongen could enjoy his transition from an avant-garde artist to society darling. There is an autobiographical element in van Dongen's work and this transition can be followed from the present painting to later paintings of the same scene; the focus shifts from strong Fauve ideals (fig. 2-4) to more recreational scenes of the bourgeoisie (fig. 5).
fig. 1, Kees van Dongen, Picasso dans son atelier au Bateau-Lavoir, 1906, 1949, lithograph, 33 x 26 cm

fig. 2, Kees van Dongen, Au Bois de Boulogne, 1906, oil on canvas, 92 x 60 cm

fig. 3, Kees van Dongen, Au Bois de Boulogne, c.1905, oil on wood, 36 x 26.5 cm

fig. 4, Kees van Dongen, Cavaliers au Bois de Boulogne, c.1908-09, oil on canvas, 64 x 53.2 cm, Musée d’art moderne André Malraux, Le Havre

fig. 5, Kees van Dongen, L’avenue des Acacias, oil on canvas, 50.3 x 65.3 cm