

## **The Fox and the Heron**

You are looking at the Fox and the Heron. The painting is very large, approximately 5 feet wide, 4 feet tall with an ornately carved gold frame. The medium is oil on canvas, and it is painted in a realistic style. The colors are true to life, yet somewhat muted, with a darker overtone except where the artist used white and tan on the main animals.

Along the bottom edge of the painting is a small pond surrounded by a grassy shore. On the grass around the edge of the pond, from left to right, a fox sits, and two herons stand side by side. A mallard duck swims in the water, looking at the fox. The fox is looking at the two herons.

Between the fox and the first heron stands a tall translucent glass jar that has a long narrow neck with a narrow mouth at the top and a large bowl on the bottom. The bowl part is filled half way with water. In the vase swim two frogs and a tadpole, a baby frog that has no appendages. The heron has stuck its bill down the long neck of the vase and is grabbing an eel. The second heron stands off to the right. Its back is facing us, and its head is turned to the left. It is watching the fox.

On the left side of the painting is a large, gnarled, old tree. It fills about 3/4's of that side of the painting extending up to the top edge. The background is rolling countryside. In the distance is the steeple of a church. The sky is blue with some clouds, and daylight. Behind the animals is a grove of trees on a low grassy hilltop.

To the right of the large tree and above the fox is a much smaller version of the central image of the fox and one heron. Between the fox and the heron is a shallow bowl.

This painting is based on one of Aesop's fables. The scene in the background illustrates the beginning of the story when the fox invites the heron for dinner but offers only a bowl of soup. With his long beak the heron cannot get anything to eat. In the foreground, the heron in turn invites the fox. Dinner is served in a long-necked glass jar with a narrow mouth and the fox can only lick the outside.

The moral of this story is: One bad turn deserves another!

This piece was painted by Frans Snyders, between 1630 and 1640. Snyders was born and died in Antwerp, Belgium. He is best known as a Flemish painter of animals and still life.