SPHINX FINE ART



Nicholas Pocock (Bristol 1741 - Maidenhead 1821)

The Burning of the Russian 74-gun Sewolod After she had been Engaged and Silenced by HMS Implacable, Captain T. Byam Martin, in the Baltic, 26 August, 1808

Circa: 1808

oil on canvas
71.7 x 101.6 cm (28¼ x 40 in)

As o'er the surge the stooping main-mast hung,

Still on the rigging thirty seamen clung;

Some, struggling, on a broken crag were cast,

And there by oozy tangles grappled fast...

...Till all benumb'd and feeble they forego

Their slippery hold, and sink to shades below.

- William Falconer, *The Shipwreck,* canto 3, 11. 658-61

Reflecting the hue of its explosive flames onto the other men-o'war ships, the *Sewolod* is engulfed after an arduous battle in the Baltic Sea. According to an eye-witnesses on board *HMS Implacable* she only succumbed 'after affording a proof of courage and perseverance highly creditable of Captain Rudnew, his officers and crew; after which the *Sewolod* hauled down her colours.' Nicholas Pocock's *The Burning of the Russian 74-gun Sewolod* is conceived in the eighteenth-century English marine painting style. Demonstrating the influence of Charles Brooking, an artist who received scant recognition in his short life, this work proceeds in the tradition established by Brooking of exquisitely drawn ships and the subtle portrayal of wind and weather.

The Burning of the Russian 74-gun Sewolod takes as its subject the victory of Captain Sir Thomas Byam Martin (1773-1854), a highly influential British Royal Navy officer who served at sea during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In 1808, Martin commanded the *HMS Implacable* in the Baltic Sea, where he was attached to the Swedish Navy, and participated in the capture and destruction of the Russian ship-of-the-line *Sewolod,* immortalised by Nicholas Pocock in this work. As a result, Martin was awarded the Cross of the Order of the Sword by the Swedish King Gustaf IV Adolf.

Originally named *Duguay-Trouin, Implaccable* was a 74-gun ship-of-the-line belonging to the French Navy, launched at Rochefort *c.*1800. On 21 October, 1805 she fought in the Battle of Trafalgar, where she was part of the vanguard of the French fleet under contre-amiral Pierre Dumanoir le Pelley, and was one of four French ships which escaped capture that day. On 3 November, 1805, British Admiral Sir Richard Strachan defeated and captured what remained of the squadron. In the battle the captain of Duguay-Trouin was killed, her masts were shot away, and she was eventually captured. She was then commissioned in the Royal Navy as a 3rd-rate and renamed HMS Implacable, as which she served for the rest of the Napoleonic Wars. Remarkably, well over a century later in 1943 she was renamed Foudroyant, but she was eventually scuttled in 1949 being, by then, the second oldest ship of the Navy, after Victory. Her figurehead (fig. 1) and stern galleries were saved and are on display in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich.

After an apprenticeship in the Bristol shipbuilding yards of Richard Champion, Pocock began a career at sea in the mid 1760s. He was a practised and gifted amateur watercolourist, and when in command of the Lloyd, one of Champion's ships, he began to keep detailed log-books illustrated with wash drawings, four of which are at the National Maritime Museum. In 1780 he gave up his martime career, and sent his first oil painting to the Royal Academy. The picture arrived too late for exhibition, but Sir Joshua Reynolds wrote back, noting 'It is much beyond what I expected from a first essay in oil colours'. Pocock exhibited annually at the Academy between 1782 and 1812 and enjoyed a steady supply of commissions for oil paintings and watercolours, mostly of a maritime subject matter. He produced a series of watercolours of Bristol in the 1780s, many of which were engraved, and also of Iceland in 1791.

Pocock worked as a war artist in the 1790s; he witnessed the Battle of the Glorious First of June (1794), recording this and several other actions of the French wars and many of these works were later engraved. Works such as the *Cutting Out of the 'Hermione'* (exhibited RA 1800; London, National Maritime Museum), are romantic in spirit and confirm his artistic range. Despite Pocock's more empirical approach, etchings of his work were used in 1804 and 1811 to illustrate editions of William Falconer's Romantic poem *The Shipwreck,* from which the opening quotation is taken.

Literature:

Letters and Papers if the Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thos. Byam Martin G.C.B, ed. Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton, G.C.B., (Publications of the Navy Reords Society, Vol. XII, 1898), p.48, (illustrated).

Engraved: Spotliswoode & Co. London.

Artist description:

After an apprenticeship in the Bristol shipbuilding yards of Richard Champion, Pocock began a career

at sea in the mid-1760s. He was a practised and gifted amateur watercolourist (his earliest signed and dated watercolour is from 1762), and when in command of the Lloyd, one of Champion's merchantmen, he began to keep detailed logbooks illustrated with wash drawings (four at London, National Maritime Museum). In 1780 he gave up his sea career, married and sent his first oil painting to the Royal Academy. The picture arrived too late for exhibition, but Sir Joshua Reynolds wrote back, noting 'It is much beyond what I expected from a first essay in oil colours'. Pocock exhibited annually at the Academy between 1782 and 1812 and enjoyed a steady supply of commissions for oil paintings and watercolours, mostly of marine subject-matter. He produced a series of watercolour views of Bristol (stylistically close to Edward Dayes) in the 1780s, many of which were engraved, and of Iceland in 1791. In 1804 and 1811, editions of William Falconer's poem *The Shipwreck* were published with plates etched after Pocock's designs.

Pocock worked as a war artist in the 1790s: he witnessed the Battle of the Glorious First of June (1794) and recorded this and several other actions of the French wars; many of these works were engraved. Less adept artistically than his predecessor Charles Brooking and less advantaged socially than his contemporaries the Serres family, Pocock was nevertheless a gifted and prolific artist. Works such as the *Cutting out of the 'Hermione'* (exh. RA 1800; London, National Maritime Museum), romantic in spirit, confirm his artistic range. One of his sons, William Innes Pocock (b Bristol, June 1783; d Reading, 13 March 1836), also became a seaman and marine artist.

Collections

Pocock is represented in the following collections: Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Manchester City Art Gallery, UK; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK; National Museums and Galleries of Wales, UK; Norwich Museums, England; Tate Gallery, London, UK; Tyne & Wear Museum, England, amongst others.